THE HERITAGE VALUE STATEMENT

TEMPLE EMANU-EL-BETH SHOLOM

CIVIC ADDRESS
4100 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount

HERITAGE DESIGNATION
Municipal - Category 1: Significant (SPAIP)
Provincial - None
Federal - None

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION
Reform Judaism

OVERVIEW OF THE VALUE STATEMENT

Historical Value
The historical heritage value resides in the long history of the Temple Emanu-El with Westmount. Its site has been continuously occupied by the same Reform congregation since 1911. Other congregations have merged and added their names. There is an important museum of Judaica and a Holocaust memorial collection. The sacrifice of the membership during both World Wars is commemorated. The complex history of the building, which survived a significant fire in 1959, is described in the cornerstone. The synagogue is celebrated for its interfaith outreach, which began under Rabbi Harry Stern (1897-1984), with his founding in 1942 of the Institute for Clergy and Religious Educators. Through the next decades, participants in his Fellowship Dinners included Mayor Jean Drapeau, Cardinal Léger and Martin Luther King. These initiatives and a specific focus on social justice issues continue today.

Contextual Value
The contextual heritage value resides in the synagogue's commanding presence on Sherbrooke Street, extending over an entire city block. Its institutional size and character make it a landmark within the surrounding residential fabric and connects it as well to the neighbouring institutions, such as Dawson College and the House of Prayer for all Nations. Although its site is now almost entirely built up, the remaining land is densely planted with shrubbery and mature trees.

Architectural and Aesthetic Value
The architectural and aesthetic heritage value resides in the skilful integration of the various construction campaigns into a single modernist composition which still subtly references the original Byzantine Revival architecture. The interior design of the 1959 sanctuary is an impressive collaboration of architectural and structural engineering talent. Its sober, noble material palette reflects Jewish traditions of nonfigurative ornamentation. The main space is defined by a folded roof, reminiscent of biblical tents, and the incorporation of generous clerestory windows within the steel structure floods the space with natural light. The stained glass windows, liturgical fittings and furniture complement the architecture. Other spaces, such as the Rodeph Shalom chapel, are interesting for their intimacy and period furniture and fabrics. The complex has a high degree of authenticity and integrity.

Spiritual and Community Value
The spiritual and community heritage value resides in the soaring volume of the sanctuary, which creates a light-filled focus on the Aron kodesh, the ark in which the Torahs are kept. The liturgical furnishings and fittings are contributing elements. Spiritual value also resides in the Rodeph Shalom chapel, deriving from the intimate nature of the space, where the Aron kodesh and bimah are in close proximity to the worshippers. The synagogue has been the site of Reform Jewish worship and community since 1911.
SITING

The Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom is situated on Sherbrooke Street, in the eastern sector of Westmount. It occupies a generous property which spans between Wood and Elm Avenues. The site is zoned for single- and two-family houses. Commercial uses are also permitted. The synagogue is neighbouring to Dawson College and to the nearby church, the House of Prayer for All Nations.

DESCRIPTION

The Temple Emanu-El congregation was founded in 1882. It is thus the oldest Reform congregation in Canadian Jewry and the only remaining one in Quebec. (In 1980, it merged with the Temple Beth Sholom, and absorbed its name.)

The sanctuary of the Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom is the second one on the site. It is a modernist design, with a steel structure and brick cladding. The design is credited to two architectural firms: Max W. Roth in collaboration with Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne.

A synagogue has traditionally been more than a place of worship – it is a community building, which fulfils three functions under one roof – a house of prayer, a house of learning and a house for gatherings. The complex contains the sanctuary, a chapel, offices, meeting/learning rooms, two reception halls, kitchens, a Holocaust gallery, and the Aron Museum of religious artefacts.

FAITH AND COMMUNITY LIFE

The Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom congregation is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism. In contrast to the Christian Reformation, the Reform movement in Judaism, which began in Germany in the 1840s and 1850s, does not seek a return to an earlier and ‘purer’ practice of the religion. In the context of the European Enlightenment and Emancipation, many Jews were asking how they could live as Jews in the modern world. The Reform movement was the first ideology to emerge in response to that question. It is a movement that seeks to modernize the practices of traditional Judaism. It removes the emphasis on the Messianic vision of the return to Zion; it shortens the prayer service and introduces into it more vernacular language; it emphasizes the importance of the rabbinical sermon, gender equality, and a focus on social justice and universal brotherhood. Each synagogue is led by a rabbi. Religious services are often, although not always, led by a cantor. As part of its mission, the synagogue offers religious ceremonies, charitable services, activities related to social justice and social actions and community activities.

RELEVANT DATES

1911
Date of construction of the first synagogue, Temple Emanu-El

1940
Construction of Elm Avenue Community House; C. Davis Goodman, architect

1957
Construction of Wood Avenue Classroom extension; Greenspoon Freedlander & Dunne with Max W. Roth architect, associate architect

1957
Fire destroys the 1911 Sanctuary

1958-1960
Building of new sanctuary, incorporating the Elm Avenue and Wood Avenue extensions, according to designs of Max W. Roth architect, with Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne; architects, Fred Lebensold architect, Ivor Kursbatt, structural engineer and Joseph Ilu, sculptor

1974-1976
Addition of a chapel at the rear/west side of the building, designed by Eliasoph, Berkowitz, Cohen & Berns architects

1980
Merger with Temple Beth Sholom to form the Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom
GOVERNANCE
Every synagogue is autonomous. Its construction, operations and maintenance, as well as the appointment of its rabbi and other religious officials are determined by the president and board of directors, who are elected for a two-year term from the membership.

RELEVANT DATES
1992
Merger with Rodeph Sholom
2014
Installation of universal access ramp on front facade
VALEUR HISTORIQUE (1/2)

DESCRIPTION

Reform Judaism: Its history in Montreal
The principles of Reform Judaism, first established in 19th century Europe, were exported to the United States and then to Canada. The first Reform congregation was established in 1883 in Montreal, as the Temple Emanu-El (God is with us), from within the membership of the Congregation Shaar Hashomayim.

The founding document of Temple Emanu-El, dated August 24, 1882, stated: "We, the undersigned Israelites of this City, recognizing the necessity of preserving Judaism in all its pristine glory, and making it clear and comprehensible to the rising generation, are in favour of organizing a progressive congregation..."

Under the leadership of Rabbi Harry Stern (1897-1984), the synagogue became instrumental in establishing links between the various faith groups in Montreal. This interfaith outreach continues to today. In recent memory, its bylaws were amended to extend membership to same-sex couples.

The First Temples Emanu-El: Montreal and Westmount
The first Temple Emanu-El was built in 1892 on the corner of Cyprus and Stanley Streets. Twenty years later, the congregation had outgrown its building. In 1910, it was given the present site in Westmount by the philanthropist, Sir Mortimer B. Davis. The synagogue on the property was designed by John Melville Miller in the Byzantine Revival style and was completed in 1911. It accommodated 700 worshippers.

Reform Judaism did away with the separation of the sexes, encouraging mixed seating. It also resulted in a significant rethinking of the fundamental architectural relationship between the Aron kodesh (ark) which houses the Torah scrolls and the bimah (reading platform). In contrast to the traditional pattern of separation of these two elements, where the ark is placed on the east wall of the sanctuary and the platform located in the middle of the space, the Reform movement groups these two elements in close proximity to each other, at the front of the sanctuary. This approach was integrated into both the 1911 architecture and into the 1959 rebuilding.

From 1911 to 1957, the complex underwent a series of additions. The first was the 1940 Elm Avenue Community House, designed by C. Davis Goodman. It was followed by the 1957 Wood Avenue classroom building, designed by Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne, with Max Wolfe Roth as the associate architect. Although both of these extensions were modernist in their designs, they continued the material palette determined by Melville Miller, including the ‘cloisonné’ brickwork. This treatment of installing broad bands of different coloured bricks is characteristic of Byzantine architecture. Sadly, shortly after the 1957 extension was completed, the sanctuary was destroyed by fire that December. The building additions, the Torah scrolls and contents of the museum were saved.

The Present Temple Emanu-El
Over a two-year period (1958 to 1960), the present synagogue was constructed, integrating the portions of the complex which had survived the fire. The architects were Max Wolfe Roth, this time in collaboration with Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne, as associate architects. In the book entitled 1882-1960, the Emanu-El Story, the unknown author also acknowledges the
HISTORICAL VALUE (2/2)

contributions of Fred Lebensold, architect and Ivor Kursbatt, structural engineer.

There is a cornerstone on the building which summarizes this history. It reads: [This] Stone from Jerusalem was laid by Hyman Grover President Temple Emanu-El, 15 Sept. 1957. Temple Emanu-El Founded 1882. Sanctuary built in 1911 on this site, destroyed by fire in 1957, rebuilt during 1958-1959 - Dedicated this 22nd day of April 1960 - Nissan 25-5720

In 1974-76, an addition for a chapel was designed by Eliasoph, Berkowitz Cohen & Berns, an incarnation of the firm having recently completed a significant expansion of the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue.

Creation of the congregation Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom
In 1980, the Temple Beth Sholom (House of Peace) which had been formed in western Montreal in 1952 joined with the Temple Emanu-El and its name was amalgamated into the present congregation.

With the 1992 merger with the Rodeph Sholom (Pursuer of Peace) congregation, originally located on the West Island of Montreal, the Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom is now the only Reform congregation in Quebec.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

- The continual use of the property for religious and community activities since 1911, by the oldest Reform congregation in Canada.
- Artefacts housed in the Aron Museum and the Holocaust Gallery.
- Art Collection.
- Cornerstone, commemorating the rebuilding of the synagogue, after the 1957 fire.
- Memorial plaques.
- The name of the chapel, which references the Rodeph Sholom congregation.
CONTEXTUAL VALUE

DESCRIPTION

A Modernist Landmark
The synagogue almost completely occupies its site, leaving modest setbacks along Sherbrooke Street and Wood and Elm Avenues. However, the lush plantings and mature trees provide the appearance of a building set in greenery, and make it an agreeable companion to the adjacent Dawson College grounds.

Its large footprint and the arresting volume of the sanctuary distinguish it from the neighbouring houses and make it a landmark in the area. This difference is further marked by the imposing front entrance, where the perception of its scale is deliberately enhanced by the screen wall, and elaborate copper sculptural element, extending the full height of the facade.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

- An imposing footprint occupying the full width of the block and high volume, making it a landmark in the area.
- The shrubbery and mature trees surrounding three sides of the property
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (1/5)

DESCRIPTION

A Phoenix Arising
After the disastrous fire in December 1957, the congregation decided to rebuild. The Board chose two architectural firms to work in collaboration: Max Wolfe Roth and Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne (GFD). It is not clear how the division of the mandate and responsibilities was done. However, it is probable that Roth was hired as the design architect and GFD as the architects of record. In a 1981 publication, GFD is listed as the associate architects to Roth, indicating that the design was primarily his.

Roth and GFD were confronted with a design problem of integration: the 1940 and 1957 additions had to be incorporated into the new complex. Their architects had already referenced the original sanctuary in the banding and use of arched windows, but had been contemporary in their overall design idiom. Roth and the design team followed their lead. Although there are references to Romanesque architecture in the curved windows, the composition and detailing are modernist.

The ‘main event’ is the sanctuary. This two-storey space has an imposing length. However, the sanctuary was designed to be divided into two and it is important to read it as such. The sanctuary is defined primarily by a folded plate roof which circumscribes a circle. The roof touches the walls at only eight points, creating the illusion that it is floating. This is further reinforced by the clerestory windows formed by the geometry of the folds. The overall effect is one of a tent, and this may be a biblical allusion to which the architects were striving. Natural light is used as an important design element, and it enters the sanctuary through the many windows, with or without stained glass, and the clerestory windows, mentioned above.

Ivor Kursbatt, the structural engineer, wrote of the complexity of designing the steel structure to support the pleated roof and to provide a clear span sanctuary, unobstructed by columns.

Within this ‘tent’ is the raised platform on which sits the Aron kodesh and the bimah. As is characteristic of the Reform movement, these two key elements of the religious service are closely spaced; no longer separated by any distance which would permit the processional favoured in Orthodox synagogues. (Of note is the fact that the Ark is not located on the eastern wall, towards Jerusalem.)

A considerable number of pews extend to an embroidered curtain which provides the ‘fourth wall’ and which can be pulled back to allow the additional pews hidden from view to become part of the sanctuary seating. This arrangement, which can be seen in other contemporary Montreal synagogues, allows the sanctuary to expand to accommodate the full congregation on the High Holidays and for large ceremonies and to contract to a more reasonable and appropriate size for the rest of the year.

There is no balcony, perhaps because this is usually associated with the gender segregation that is an anathema to Reform Judaism. However, in keeping with traditional synagogue design, the ornamentation is limited to the non-figurative. This statement is best illustrated by the designs in the stained glass; on the sanctuary curtain, painted by J.S. Rangi; on the curtain in front of the Ark and
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (2/5)

on the front and sides of the bimah. Symbolism related to Judaic themes and history, such as the dove of peace, the burning bush and the pomegranate, are favoured over imagery depicting the human form. Sculptural elements were contributed by Joseph Iliu.

There is a 1959 Casavant organ which is masked by the wall panelling. The stone wall panelling is of note. Geometrically based, as is much of the ornamentation, it performs an acoustic function as well as an aesthetic one.

A Collaboration of Many Talents

There are several architects and artists, who contributed their talents to the temple. The following are biographies from several sources. However, it should be noted that research on modernist Canadian architects is still in its infancy and so the information can be summary or, as in the case of Joseph Dunne, non-existent.

The Max Roth Collection is at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA)

"Max Wolfe Roth (1913-2001) was born in Montréal, Québec. In 1933, Roth began his studies at McGill University’s School of Architecture and four years later, he graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture. In 1938, Roth established the Montréal office of Max W. Roth, Architect, and in 1962, he became a member of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada. In 1970, he founded an interior design studio, Roth Designs Limited. From 1984-2001, Roth worked in partnership with William D’Onofrio – the firm operated as Roth+D’Onofrio, Architectes. Throughout his extensive career, Roth designed over 1500 architectural projects. From the late 1950s and onwards, Roth collaborated with a number of Montréal firms on various projects, including Greenspoon, Friedlander & Dunne for the reconstruction of Temple Emanu-El Synagogue (Montréal, 1959), Ian Martin for the Pont-Viau Shopping Centre (Laval, 1960), and the office of Eliasoph & Berkowitz for an unrealized headquarters for the Canadian Jewish Congress (Montréal, 1963). Roth also employed artists for modern sculptures and murals in his buildings; the Leon Adler Office Building in Ville St. Laurent (1954), for example, incorporated artworks by Joseph Iliu and Robert Roussil.

Roth produced a number of well-known projects for the Canadian World Exposition (Expo ’67) in Montréal: La Ronde’s Garden of Stars, the bookstore in the British Pavilion, and the interior of the Pavilion of Judaism. Roth also submitted a design for the Québec Pavilion competition in 1964, which received a jury mention.

Other built projects designed by Roth in Montréal include the St. Regis Tavern (1951), the Ruby Foo’s hotel (1962, with hotel addition, 1986), the Beth-El Synagogue (1956, alterations to addition, 1968-69), the Dominion Lock Factory (extended and altered from 1959-1972), and the Canada Park Pavilion (1973-1974, Israel) for the Canadian Jewish National Fund."

From the Dictionary of Canadian Architects 1800-1950:

“GREENSPOON, Henry Eli (1909-2001), active in Montreal, Quebec from 1934 until after 1970. He was born in Montreal on 15 August 1909 and attended public and high schools there, and later studied architecture at McGill University where he graduated in 1933. He trained in the office of Fetherstonhaugh & Durnford in 1933-34, and in the summer of 1934 an announcement appeared
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (3/5)

in the R.A.I.C. Journal, xi, July-Aug. 1934, 124 regarding the formation of a new architectural partnership between Greenspoon and another McGill graduate Milton EliaSoph (...)

Their collaboration ended in 1942 and Greenspoon worked under his own name until 1950 when he was joined by two new partners Philip Freedlander and Joseph Dunne.

Their successful practice lasted more than twenty years, and they completed major commissions in Montreal, in Ottawa, and elsewhere in western Quebec and in eastern Ontario. Their professional reputation was considerably enhanced by their association with leading world-renowned modernist architects who were commissioned to complete major works in Montreal such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe of Chicago, Pier L. Nervi and Luigi Moretti of Milan, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill of New York City. In each case, Greenspoon and his firm served as the local associate architects, coordinating and supervising construction of major projects such as Place Victoria (1964-65), Westmount Square (1966-67) and CIL House (1961-62).

Greenspoon retired after 1975 and moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1979. He later died there on 18 May 2001, and was buried at Palms Memorial Park in Sarasota (...)."

"FREEDLANDER, Philip (1918-1990), partner in the firm of Greenspoon, Freedlander & Dunne, Montreal, was born there on 30 August 1918 and educated at the École des Beaux Arts in Montreal where he graduated in 1939. He trained under J.C. Meadowcroft in 1941-42, then served with the Canadian Army in Europe in 1942-45. After returning to Montreal in 1946 he was junior architect to H.E. Greenspoon 1947-48 and was invited by him to form a partnership in 1949 (...). The firm was active for the next twenty years; their works include several high rise apartment blocks and collaboration with the leading Italian architect Pier Luigi Nervi for the design of Place Victoria, Montreal (1963-64), and with Mies van der Rohe on the design of Westmount Square in 1964-66. Freedlander was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Inst. of Canada in 1966, and died in Montreal on 19 June 1990."

Joseph Dunne: no biographical information found.

From The Art Public Montreal website: "Joseph Ilu (1914-1999) was born in Sibiu, Roumania. He is also known as Josef, Josif, Josif and Ilyu. He studied at the fine arts schools of Cluj and Bucharest. Winner of the prestigious Prix de Rome, he lived there from 1942 to 1949 and then moved to Paris. From 1949 to 1951 he exhibited abstract and geometric paintings in solo exhibitions and at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. He was part of Groupe Espace, which brought together European artists, artisans and architects who advocated for a modern relationship between art and architecture.

Ilu arrived in Montréal in 1951 and joined the avant-garde art scene. He exhibited paintings at the Galerie Agnès Lefort in 1953 and was later part of a group show at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. He also joined the Non-Figurative Artists Association of Montreal. Ilu innovated in public art by proposing in 1955 to install geometric abstract pieces in front of modernist..."
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (4/5)

buildings. He enjoyed a prolific career as a muralist in the Montréal region and elsewhere: Québec, Canada, the United States. He created many wall pieces, primarily in mosaics and metal, and a few sculptures. His murals elicit great interest among art critics, as do his paintings. After 1968, he began spending time in France, and moved there in 1988.”

Liturgical Furnishings
Of note is the Aron kodesh; the Torah scrolls with their coverings; the ner tamid or eternal flame; and the wood bimah, with its carvings of the dove of peace, the pomegranate and the burning bush. There are six officiant chairs and many pews, but they are of lesser heritage value.

Architectural Authenticity
The building demonstrates a high degree of architectural authenticity and integrity on both its exterior and interior.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Exterior features
• The volume, including the rectangular footprint.
• The monumental doorway on the main facade, and the large star-shaped dome that streams light into the sanctuary.
• The distinctive features of the main facade, including the impressive copper tube sculpture that enhances the large front entry bay.
• The exterior materials, including the brick walls and wooden doors and windows.

Interior features
• Space division
• The arrangement of the main sanctuary, including the amphitheatre-style plan in the front part, the tiered bench seating in the back part, and the octagonal shape of the apse that houses the bimah.
• The chapel, including the pews.
• The interior materials, including the vertical stone panels, travertine panels, acoustic tiles.
• The stained-glass windows.

Interior decoration / integrated art
• The large curtain, painted by J.S. Rangi, that can be deployed between the two parts of the nave.
• Stained-glass windows.
ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC VALUE (5/5)

Benches in the front part of the nave
Photo: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

Benches in the front part of the nave
Photo: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

View of the back part of the nave, as seen from the front
Photo: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

The borders in front of the windows in the nave
Photo: Bergeron Gagnon inc.

The perpetual lamp, hanging in front of the Ark
Photo: Bergeron Gagnon inc.
VALEUR COMMUNAUTAIRE ET SPIRITUELLE

DESCRIPTION

A Complex Reflecting Jewish Spiritual Values
The building contains the three components of a synagogue: the Beit tefillah (a house of prayer), exemplified by the grand sanctuary and the intimate chapel; the Beit midrash (a house of study), incorporating classrooms and other learning spaces and finally; the Beit Knesset (a house of gathering), exemplified by the Community Hall and all the spaces where lifecycle events and communal celebrations are marked.

A Community Space
Religious Activities: religious ceremonies (weddings, births, bar and bat mitzvahs, Sabbath and Festival services), religious education.

Activities related to social justice and social actions: food preparation for different organizations and food collections for both members and non-members (major food collection), Miriam Home (special need challenges).

Community Activities: cultural and social activities; educational activities, dance school.

Museum, Gallery and Shop.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

- The decorative components and liturgical furniture, including the bimah, the Ark containing the Torah scrolls, the ner tamid or eternal flame that hangs in front of the Ark, the mezuzahs.
- The light streaming through the clerestory windows, focusing on the bimah.
- The Casavant organ.
- Assembly spaces for religious celebrations, community gathering and activities.
PROCESS

This Value Statement is based on a visit made in the autumn of 2016, analysis and a group discussion held on August 21, 2018.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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