

Temple Emanu-El - עִמָּנוּאֵל ("God Is With Us")

History Summary

Built 1863

1461 Blanshard Street, Victoria, British Columbia
The Oldest Continuously Operating Synagogue in Canada
Designated National Historic Site
Home to a Diverse and Active Jewish Community

1 September 2011



Temple Emanu-el, SE Corner of Blanshard at Pandora Street, c1900 (BCA A-09157)



Synagogue, 1985 (BCA I-04856)

Temple Emanu-El (עִמָּנוּאֵל, "God is with us"), built in 1863, just five years after the Fraser River Gold Rush and used since by an active and diverse congregation, is the oldest continuously operated synagogue in Canada. As we approach the 150th anniversary of its construction we wish to revisit its unique history and recognize the contribution it has made to our community. This report summarizes highlights.

Website

www.congregationemanu-el.ca

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Entranceway detail

Historical Background

Victoria was founded as a trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1843. It was named for the reigning monarch, and became the administrative centre of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island in 1849. The 1858 Fraser River Gold Rush greatly increased Victoria's population. It was incorporated as a City in 1862. In 1866, Vancouver Island was united with the Mainland colony of British Columbia and two years later Victoria became the capital. In 1871, British Columbia joined the Dominion of Canada as its westernmost province.

Jewish Settlement in Victoria

Victoria's Jewish community was established in 1858 when the first Jewish settlers arrived. Members were primarily of English, Austrian, German and Polish origin. Well-educated and ambitious, this small group soon established themselves as traders, merchants and wholesalers. Most, if not all, had migrated first to California during its gold rush period during the late 1840s and early 1850s before moving north to Victoria. Unlike the majority of other fortune seekers, they were motivated less by the quest for gold than by commercial interest and the potential markets for supplies and services being generated by the rush:

The beginnings of the city of Victoria are really due to the Jews. For, no matter how many persons streamed to the island at the outbreak of the gold fever, they scattered again, for the most part, to all corners of the world when their disillusion followed only too quickly. The Jews, however, held their ground, set up tents for residence and booths for shops; for they soon realized that this place had a great commercial future.

Three Years in America: 1859-1862 Volume II, I.J. Benjamin.

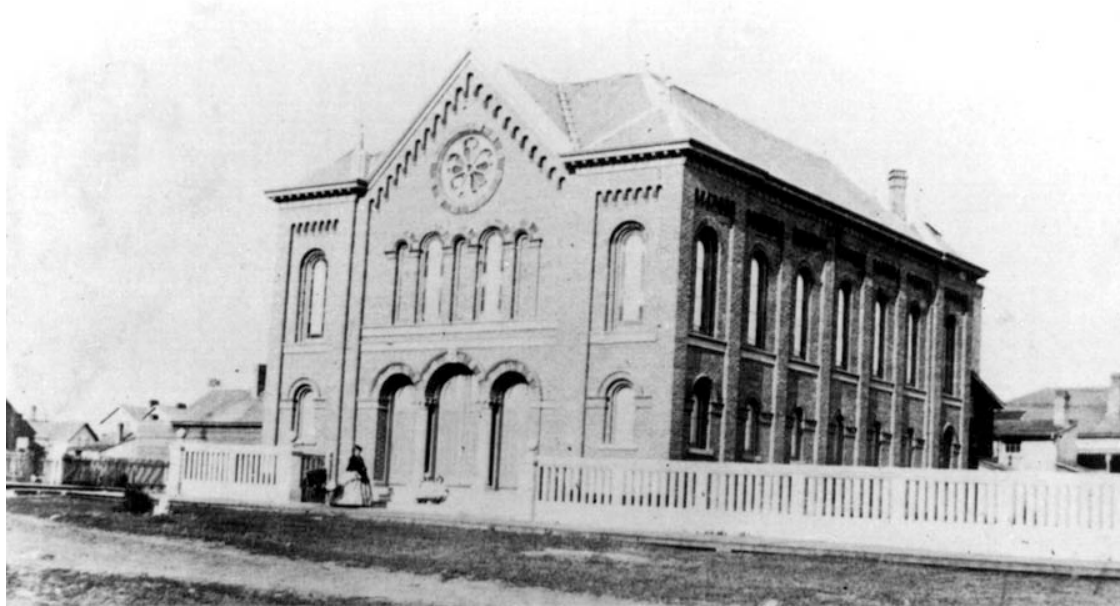
Many enjoyed well-established connections with San Francisco-based firms that enabled them to capture a substantial portion of the mercantile trade in the colony. This early group of Jewish settlers quickly assumed an economic importance considerably out of proportion to its size. As Victoria was the principal port and distribution centre of the two coastal colonies, it attracted the majority of Jewish arrivals during this period. It was therefore the first location in which a permanent congregation was organized. Members of the Jewish community, many of whom were merchants who had come north from San Francisco to service the buoyant economy fuelled by the Fraser River gold rush, were community spirited, respected, and generally well accepted by other settlers. Jews were particularly active in the local Masonic lodge.

The growing Jewish community organized a Victoria Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1858, called Chevra Bikur Cholim Ukedusha. In the fall of 1858, the Jewish settlers organized High Holy Day Services that were held in a private house on Johnson Street, and later services were held in rented quarters until the synagogue was constructed.

On 22 May 1859 a meeting of the city's Jews was held "for the purpose of procuring a suitable place for a burying ground" and by the following year a parcel of land, on Fern Hill Road at Cedar Hill Road, was donated and consecrated. "Bays Ha Chayim" (House of the Living) is the Hebrew phrase on the gatepost of Victoria's Jewish Cemetery, the oldest in western Canada. The consecration of the Jewish Cemetery - still in use today - took place in 1860. The first Jewish burial, 20 March 1861, was that of Morris Price, a Freemason who was murdered at Cayoosh

near the present town of Lillooet. Monuments for the Oppenheimer family, well known in mercantile circles, and for Canada's first Jewish judge, are of particular interest.

Lewis Lewis (1828-1904) was typical of the Jewish pioneers of Victoria and British Columbia. His dry goods business was established in 1861, and prospered until his retirement in 1900. Lewis was one of the more prominent citizens in Victoria, affiliated with many local organizations, and was a member of the city's first volunteer fire brigade. He was also prominent in Victoria's Jewish community. Lewis was president of Congregation Emanu-el for eight years, and donated the land for the establishment of the Jewish Cemetery. He was also a founder of the first Masonic lodge in Victoria



Synagogue Emanu-El, circa 1866-70 [British Columbia Archives A-05964]

The construction of a house of worship was a tremendous undertaking for a small Jewish congregation composed of fewer than fifty members. A building committee was established to canvass the community for donations, which were successfully received from a diversity of local Victorians. A piece of land "suitable in all respects" for a future synagogue was purchased for \$730 at the corner of Blanshard and Pandora. Current membership was 49, but it was clearly anticipated that the rapid increase in population would continue.

The Hebrews of Victoria are both numerous, wealthy and public spirited. They intend to erect a fine building on the corner of Government (sic) and Pandora Streets for a synagogue. The building will seat some 350 persons, and in its galleries perhaps 200 more. The lot is 60 feet by 200 feet on which it will be built. It is paid for already, and \$900 has been subscribed towards the Synagogue. A committee will shortly go around to take up subscriptions in aid of the object. We trust that a generous response will be made. *The British Colonist*, 26 November 1862, page 3.

Ads were published in the Daily Colonist as a means of invitation to cornerstone laying ceremonies – two notices alerted residents of a postponement of the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone. The ceremony was successfully carried out on June 2, 1863 with the Daily Colonist reporting on June 3 that “...the sun shone bright, and the previous showers had conferred some benefit by cooling the atmosphere and laying the dust, which would otherwise have proved disagreeable.”

The ceremony was claimed as the first public activity to attract official attendance of Victoria's Masonic fraternity. In addition, the cornerstone that was laid is recognized as signifying the first foundation of a place of Jewish worship in Queen Victoria's West Pacific dominions. Invitations to participate in the parade and ceremony of June 2, 1863 were accepted by the French Benevolent Society, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, Germania Sing Verein (German Singing Club), St. Andrew's Society, and the Fraternity of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons. The large group made for a decorative and diverse procession, and the noise en route to the Synagogue site was magnified by the music of a Royal Navy band from the H.M.S. Topaze.

As this stone which we are about to lay will be the foundation upon which this structure will rest, so let peace and harmony be the foundation stone of your hearts...

Mr. S. Hoffman, Vice President of Congregation Emanu - El, at the laying of the Synagogue cornerstone, 2 June 1863

Thus terminated an eventful day in the history of the Jews in Vancouver Island, and it must be a source of infinite gratification to that body, that the ceremonies of this day, partaking as they did of a purely denominational character, were participated in by all classes of our community with a hearty goodwill and brotherly feeling, evidenced in acts more powerful than words the high esteem in which they were held by their fellow townsmen of the City of Victoria'

The *British Colonist*, 3 June 1863, page 3.

Two cornerstones were laid at the Synagogue site. The first was set in place by Mr. Malowanski, a member of the Synagogue Building Committee, and the second laid by the Worshipful Master of a local Masonic Order. Responding to the Masonic Officers and participants present at the afternoon ceremony, the Right Worshipful Master of Masons stated “I beg to express the honor we feel in being invited to take part in any ceremony having a holy useful, or benevolent design and more particularly in aiding in the erection of a Temple to be dedicated to the glory of God and his Holy name.”

The jointly coordinated activities of the Synagogue ceremony reflect the historic relationship between the Jewish community and members of the Masonic Craft, dating back to the construction of Solomon's Temple. The laying of the Synagogue cornerstone on Pandora Street was extolled as an important community gathering for the people of Victoria. The newspaper notes that English, Hebrew, and German languages were all spoken aloud as the Synagogue ceremonies progressed through the afternoon, and Mr. S. Hoffman was quoted as stating “For, as I look around me, I behold adherents to every creed...” The pride articulated in this statement

suggests that the participatory nature of the ceremonies was deliberate and well-intentioned. Alongside the important Jewish documents that were deposited below the cornerstone, the French Benevolent Society and *Germania Sing Verein* were given an opportunity to deposit their membership lists as well. The laying of the cornerstones for the Synagogue of Congregation Emanu-El should be understood as an important event in the history of Victoria, highlighting the complex intersection of race, culture, business, and community.

British Colonist, 6 June 1859, page 2

“A meeting was held yesterday by the Israelites of Victoria who organized a benevolent society under the name of the “First Victoria Hebrew Benevolent Society”. The constitution and bye-laws were unanimously adopted, and the following gentlemen elected officers for the ensuing year – A. Blackman, President; L. Davis, V. President; S.S Hymes, Sec.; K. Gambitz, Treas.; Messrs. Cohn, L. Lewis, A. Philips, S. Wolf, and I. Tashe, Trustees, and Moses Abram, messenger.”

British Colonist, 26 November 1862, page 3

“HEBREW SYNAGOGUE – The Hebrews of Victoria are both numerous, wealthy, and public spirited. They intend to erect a fine building on the corner of Government and Pandora streets for a Synagogue. The building will seat below some 350 persons, and in the gallery perhaps 200 more. The lot is 60x120 feet on which it will be built. It is paid for already and \$900 has been subscribed towards the Synagogue. A committee will shortly go around to take up subscriptions and aid of the object. We trust that a generous response will be made.”

British Colonist, 3 June 1863, page 3

“IMPOSING CEREMONY: Laying the Foundation Stone of the Hebrew Synagogue The proceedings in connection with the above event lost none of their interest from the postponement necessarily occasioned by the heavy fall of rain on Monday. The weather yesterday answered the most ardent hopes of all; the sun shone bright, and the previous showers had conferred some benefit by cooling the atmosphere and laying the dust, which would otherwise have proved disagreeable.

Precisely at 2 p.m. the Band of H. M. S. Topaze was met by the Congregation Emanu-El and Germania Sing Verein opposite their rooms on Yates street; they proceeded to the Star and Garter Hotel where they were joined by the Hebrew Benevolent French Benevolent, and St. Andrew's Societies, and then marched to the Masonic Hall on Langley street, where they received the members of the Victoria and Vancouver Lodges. The procession then formed two deep in the following order and marched to the spot where the ceremony was to take place on Cormorant street, headed by the Band which played some excellent marches in their usual masterly style.

ORDER OF PROCESSION

The Band of H.M.S. Topaze under their leader Mr. Jarrett.

Marshal of the Day, Mr. A. Hoffman.

The Architect with the plans and Mr. Malowanski, one of the Building Committee.

Officers of Congregation Emanu-El.

D. Shirpser, President, S. Hoffman, Vice President.

A. Hoffman, Secretary, A. Blackman, Treasurer.

A.J. Brunn, D. Kauffman, I.M. Moritz, Trustees, and the members.

The Hebrew Benevolent Society, H.M. Cohen, Marshal.

The Germania Sing Verein, leader Prof. St. Clair.

The St. Andrew's Society.

The French Benevolent Society, President, M. Lotbiniere.

The Fraternity of Ancient, and Honorable Order of Freemasons of Victoria and Vancouver Lodge, with their visiting brethren, numbering over seventy members, with their full insignia of office.

The names of the officers of both Lodges, in their perfect order of rank, will appear hereafter.

Each of the Societies was characterized by its peculiar badges – the Masons, in particular, presenting a most imposing appearance. We should, however, state that their numbers were strengthened by the addition of a good many who belonged, as well, to the other Societies present.

The procession extended over several hundred feet of ground, and was followed by a host of citizens. The site of the projected synagogue was reached about 3 o'clock. Two platforms had been erected, and the corner stones were in the slings, ready to be lowered. The fraternity of Masons were placed around the northern corner, while the members of the congregation and the other societies arranged themselves at the southern corner. A large platform with seats had been provided for the accommodation of the ladies, who attended in great force.

Mr. Malowanski then proceeded to read in the Hebrew Tongue the CXXVII Psalm which being concluded, the Germania Sing Verein, led by Mr. St. Clair, chanted some sacred music in a sweet and pleasant manner.

Mr. S. Hoffman, in a few preliminary remarks, stated that he had been chosen by the Congregation Emanu-El to address them on this occasion. We are assembled here on an occasion which will form an era in the history of the Jews of this island: We are here on an occasion that should make every true religious heart throb with joy and satisfaction. We are here to lay the foundation of the first Synagogue in Her Majesty's dominions on this side of the Pacific. Should we not rejoice to behold an edifice dedicated to God, in this far Northern clime? Yes; we should rejoice with all our hearts at the erection of either a church, chapel, or temple. Does it, perhaps, matter, with what form or ceremonies we praise our Maker? Are, perchance, the prayers of Catholic or Protestant less acceptable to the Lord than those of the Israelites, or other religious denominations? I believe not. But I do believe that a most essential part in religion exists in the trueness, goodness, and uprightness of every man's heart.

I am glad both of my assertions manifest themselves so plainly here to-day. For, as I look around me, I behold adherents to every creed, to witness the erection of another edifice wherein the name of the Almighty will be hallowed and sanctified. I therefore repeat again, we should hail with joy the erection of buildings devoted to prayer. Prayer is the basis of morality, education, and welfare of a great nation. Who would have thought that, in the short space of five years, we should have a temple erected where then the aborigines were the lords of the domain? Who would have dreamt that in this isolated part of the globe, where, ere now, the foot of white men had hardly trod, there should spring up a comparatively large city, studded with magnificent edifices, and inhabited by a large concourse of intelligent people? Who would not have ridiculed the idea that where, ere now, nought but the hunter's step and wild beasts' roar ever disturbed the wilderness, should, at this early day, be erected a synagogue by the scattered tribes of Israel? With feelings amounting almost to envy, have we beheld the erection in this city of churches of almost every denomination extant; but what could we, a handful of people, do to gain a similar edifice? It is easy to remember the advent of the first Israelite. Nevertheless, scattered as our race are all over the world, and limited in numbers, as we generally are, compared to our Gentile brethren, I am proud to say, that since we first made our appearance, one by one, we have each and all striven manfully to uphold that religion which has been handed down to us by our forefathers.

My friends and brethren: In the spectacle before us, how many endearing recollections do not crowd themselves upon our memory. It will remind some of us of the land that gave us birth. Early days, when side by side, with good, kind, pious old parents, we walked hand in hand to our temples, there to pay homage to our maker. It will remind us of those happy days when cares and troubles were unknown to our unsophisticated mind. When with gladdened hearts we skipped playfully to our Sabbath schools, there to receive the wholesome and well-meant doctrines of our venerable teachers. Though our past life may have been a very rugged one – though pangs and dismay may have shot through our hearts – though dismal clouds may often have obscured the rays of our happiness, circumstances may have bid us this to leave relatives, friends, and home behind us to wander forth to a strange land, and there to gain the wherewithal of life; yet, as I behold this scene before me, hope shines more serenely bright, and soft eyed Mercy sheds a glistening tear – a tear of joy and love.

My friends and brethren: These may not be the only thoughts that occupy our attention this day. When we look back into the history of our nation we find there ample room for reflection. I will, however, refrain from entering into details, inasmuch as I fear to tire your patience. I need, however, but mention, that from the time of our deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Jews have successively, under the iron rod of the Romans, Greeks – in fact all other formidable nations, been trampled upon and coerced. Through the dark ages, how poignant and deep their sorrows! A poor, forsaken, scattered and persecuted race. Even in modern ages, the time had not long passed by when their rights were denied to them, and they had to submit meekly to the scores, scoffs and contumelies of their fellow creatures. But how different is it now! The rays of justice and rue feelings of humanity have at last entered into the benighted and bigoted souls of our persecutors. Our chains are thrown aside – our rights restored – and in almost every country we enjoy with our fellow citizens the same rights, the same blessings, and the same laws. Religious liberty – the doctrine inculcated by the Almighty Himself – is spreading its benign influence over every land on the face of the globe, and the Jews of to-day, I am proud to say, stand second to no other sect.

My friends: I did not intend occupying much of our time. Before I conclude there is, however, one essential thing which I would most particularly impress upon the minds of my fellow-members: it is the good doctrine of union and harmony. If peace and harmony be your guiding star, let it be the motto inscribed in the heart of every member of this organization, and God will shower His blessings upon you. King David with all his glory, with all his greatness and might, was forbidden, by prophecy, to build a temple, because of his numerous wars and struggles with other nations, and the prophecy was left to be fulfilled by his son Solomon. As this stone which we are about to lay will be the foundation upon which this structure will rest, so let peace and harmony be the foundation stone of your hearts, without which your structure will crumble into dust, your cherished hopes and disappointed, your plans frustrated.

In conclusion, I would fervently pray to God that he may support us in our undertakings – that he may infuse a feeling of peace and harmony in the hearts of my brethren, and that this temple may become a bright gem among the glorious constellation of churches in this our adopted country.

We regret we have not space to give the remainder of the speeches in full. – [REP.] Mr. J.P.

Davies followed and spoke with fervency and fluency. He concluded his remarks by pointing out the good objects of the various societies and thanking them for their attendance there. In addressing himself to the fraternity of Masons, he observed that it was not 2675 years since the Temple of Solomon was built and the present was the first instance since then of the ancient order of Masons or any other fraternity taking part in laying the foundation stone of a Jewish edifice.

Dr. Boscowitz gave a most spirited and eloquent address in the German language. When the various speeches were ended the following formula were observed:

List of subscribers to lot – deposited by A. Simson. Constitution of Chebra Bikur Cholim Ukedusha –by John Malowanski.

List of members of German Sing Verein and French Benevolent Society – by Mr. Koshland.

The Constitution of the Congregation, together with the BRITISH COLONIST, of yesterday, and its contemporaries and coins – by Mr. D. Shirpser.

List of subscribers to the Synagogue and its officers and members – by Mr. Vaenberg.

The Stone was thereupon laid in duo form by Mr. Malowanski; the Sing Verein rendering the magnificent sacred melody, "This is the day of our Lord," with fine effect.

After the conclusion of the Hebrew ceremonies the principal architect addressed the Worshipful Master, saying – "Right Worshipful Master; with the blessing of Almighty God we desire to erect a building here to the honor and glory of His Holy name. Plans have been prepared which I submit for your approval and on behalf of the Congregation Emanu El request that you will be pleased to lay the corner stone.

The R. W. M. replied to the following purport: Brother Principal Architect – On behalf of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Freemasons in Victoria, I beg to express the honor we feel in being invited to take part in any ceremony having a holy useful, or benevolent design and more particularly in aiding in the erection of a Temple to be dedicated to the glory of God and His Holy name. I shall have much pleasure in laying the corner stone of this Temple with all the ancient honors of the order.

The Germania Sing Verein then sung an ode and the Band played “Hail Masonry.” After this the Chaplain delivered a prayer in the form usually observed on similar occasions.

The R.W.M. then called upon the Principal Architect to deposit the scroll and by-laws of the Lodges in the stone, which was accordingly done, and a copy of the scroll read by the Principal Architect, which was as follows:

RECORD DEPOSITED IN AN HERMETICALLY SEALED BOTTLE, AND DEPOSITED IN THE STONE.

The corner stone of this edifice was laid in due form on the second day of June, A. L. 5863, A.D.1863, by the two Masonic Lodges in the city of Victoria, Vancouver Island, viz.:Victoria Lodge, No. 1085, held under the United Grand Lodge of England, of which Thomas Dundas, Earl of Zetland, is Grand Master; and Vancouver Lodge, No. 421, held under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, of which the Duke of Athol is Grand Master.

The names of the officers and members of each Lodge will be found in a copy of the By-laws, The Lodges having met, formed themselves, into one Lodge, and the following officers performed the labors of the day:

Robert Burnaby, R.W.M.; J.W. Powell, R. W.D.M.; J.J. Southgate, R.W.S.W.; H. Aguilier, R.W.J.W.; George Cruikshank, Treasurer; Wm. Henry Thain, Secretary; Richard Lewis, Principal Architect; Hon. Judge Cameron, Bible Bearer; Rev. Richard L. Lowe, Chaplain; Thomas Harris, S.D.; Samuel Goldstone, J.D.; James Curtis, J.G.; James A. McCrea, S.B. Bearers of the Lesser Lights – Brothers N.J. Newstead, H.F. Heisterman, and T.G. Williams. Bearers of the Working Tools – Brothers Morris Myer, Kady Kambitz, and Moses Sporborg. Bearers of the Ashes – Brothers A.G. Main and Walter Edwards. Stewards – Brothers M.A. Waitt, L. Franklin, E. Marks, G. Webster. O. Guard – George Creighton.D. Ceremonies – Louis J. Shepard.Marshal – John P. Couch.

The cement was spread, and the Stone lowered, in three drops, the Band playing during the interval. The proper tools were then applied to the stone by the Senior and Junior Wardens, and the Deputy Pest-Masters, under the direction of the Architect. After which the Right Worshipful Master put the usual questions to the officers. If the Stone was “plumb” “level” and “square”. Upon receiving a reply in the affirmative, he said: “Nothing then remains for me bit to set the Stone” – on which three wraps were given on the Stone with the “gavel”, and he then said:

“May this Building be conducted, and carried on successfully until its completion, according to the plans, in peace, harmony, and brotherly love.”

The Band, hereupon, played the National anthem, in which the Sing Verein joined. The Corn of nourishment, Wine of refreshment, and Oil of joy, in succession were passed to the R.W.M., who poured the same upon the stone.

Grand honors being accorded to each in the usual form.

The R.W.M., delivering the exhortation in the form prescribed by the Masonic Ritual.

An Ode was then sung by the Sing Verein, after which a prayer was read by the Chaplain, and sacred music performed by the band concluded the ceremonies.

Mr. K. Gambitz hereupon stepped forward, and in a few pertinent remarks presented the neat little silver Trowel used in laying the stone to the R.W.M., on behalf of the congregation Emanu-El. The R.W.M..R. Burnaby, Esq., accepted the presentation in a few well delivered and appropriate remarks.

The Trowel which was manufactured by Mr. E. Watson of this city, bore the following inscription: -

“Presented by the Congregation Emanu-El, of Victoria Lodge 1085, F. & A.M., at the laying of the Corner Stone of their Synagogue, June 1st, 5623 (1863).”

The Band again struck up the National Anthem; and at its termination the procession reformed, and returned to town, where the various societies were escorted to their respective assembly rooms by the members of the congregation.

The greatest decorum was observed by the spectators throughout the entire proceedings, and not a single incident occurred to mar the harmony which prevailed.

Thus terminated an eventful day in the history of the Jews in Vancouver Island, and it must be a source of infinite gratification to that body, that the ceremonies of this day, partaking as they did of a purely denominational character, were participated in by all classes of our community with a hearty goodwill and brotherly feeling, evidenced in acts more powerful than words the high esteem in which they were held by their fellow townsmen of the City of Victoria.”

British Colonist, September 14, 1863 (page 3)

“CONSECRATION OF THE JEWISH SYNAGOGUE

Yesterday afternoon the handsome edifice on Cormorant street, erected by our fellow townsmen of the Jewish faith, for the celebration of Divine service in conformity with the ritual of the Hebrew Church, was solemnly consecrated in the presence of the Congregation Emanu-El and a large concourse of citizens, who thronged the building and evinced the deepest interest in the ceremony.

The following was the order of service observed on the occasion. The choir, under the leadership of Professor St. Clair, rendered the changes with great effect. At the termination of the proceedings Dr. Cohen delivered an impressive sermon.

ORDER OF SERVICE

The Minister, with assistants bearing the scrolls of the Laws, knocked at the entrance door of the Synagogue three times, saying – Open for me the gates of Righteousness that I may enter though them to praise the Lord; as this is the gate into which the righteous shall enter.

On entering the Synagogue, the Reader and Choir will say – Blessed be he who cometh in the Name of the Lord; We bless you from the House of the Lord.

READER – How awful is this place; it is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven. (Repeated by Choir.)

[During the repetition, the Scrolls of the Laws are carried around the Synagogue three times, and then placed in the Ark.]

READER – And when the Ark set forward, Moses said –

CHOIR ANSWERS – Arise, O! Lord, and scatter Thy enemies and cause those that hate Thee to flee before Thee.

READER – And when the Ark set forward, Moses said –

CHOIR ANSWERS – Blessed by He who hath given the Law to His people Israel in His Holiness. [The Reader advances to the Ark and takes out the Scrolls, one of which he places in the hands of the Minister, and retains one himself.] Saying –Here,

O! Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Repeated by Choir.)

READER – Our God is one; or Lord is great, holy, and tremendous is His name. (Choir repeats.)

READER – O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us together extol His name.

CHOIR – Thine, O Lord! Are the greatness, power and glory: victory and majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine: Thine is the kingdom, O Lord! And Though art exalted as

supreme above all: extol ye the Lord, our God, and bow down at His footstool, for He is holy. Extol ye the Lord our God and worship at His holy mount, for the Lord our God is holy.

The scroll is taken to the reader's desk and the minister and assistants chant Psalms, Nos: 20, 30, 122, 15 and 29.

Reader chants prayer in Hebrew.

Minister offers a prayer for the Royal Family and a prayer for the repose of the Late Prince Consort.

READER – Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted.

CHOIR – His glory is above the earth and the heavens; He will also exalt the horn of His people; a praise of all saints, even the Children of Israel; a people near unto Him. Hallelujah.

The Reader then takes the Scroll to the Ark during which the Choir sings Psalm 24.

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Cohen in English.

“Hallelujah” by the Choir.

Benediction.”

The Bulletin, June 3, 1982 (pages 9-10)

When we began our project in 1978 to restore Victoria's Synagogue, now Canada's oldest standing synagogue, all of us knew that we had taken on an immense project and that the chances of failure were greater than the likelihood of success.

Where were we to find the estimated quarter of a million dollars to pay for it? Our mandate from the congregation required that we raise the money entirely through voluntary contributions, not through any kind of special levy upon our annual dues; and that we proceed only as the monies were raised. As well, the complexity and difficulty of restoring a building now into its second century, were daunting.

Yet as chairman of Emanuel's newly created Restoration Committee, I was very fortunate in the unusual people who were willing to work on such a project. They included Henry Brown, a retired businessman and treasurer of the Congregation; Michael Goldberg, a downtown businessman; Allan Klenman, a realtor and president of the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia; Ben Levinson, an architect, Gene Miller, publisher; and Felix Reuben, a lawyer.

None of us knew anything about raising money or, with the exception of Ben Levinson, anything about restoring old buildings. Some of us regularly attended shul, others only infrequently. One of us wasn't even a member of the congregation. Yet all of us were determined to success in our undertaking.

This isn't the place to provide a full accounting of our fund-raising strategies. Those who have engaged in this arcane pursuit will recognize that: occasionally we were left near bitter tears at a mean-spirited response to our efforts; sometimes in uproarious laughter at the unpredictable and bizarre behavior of some people around money; and frequently with deep gratitude and jubilation at the generosity of the human spirit.

We received a grant of \$50,000 from the B.C. Heritage Trust, the largest single grant given by that body to date. Subsequently, we received a supplementary grant of \$25,000 from the Trust and only a few weeks ago were awarded a \$7,000 grant to recreate the original fence around the synagogue. The Bronfman foundation gave us two grants of \$10,000 each. Arthur Fouks of Vancouver facilitated our contact with members of the Vancouver Jewish community where we ultimately raised some \$30,000. The City of Victoria provided us with a special decorative sidewalk around the synagogue plus a \$5,000 grant.

We organized benefit concerts and a benefit dinner, none of which had been previously attempted in Victoria. Many ordinary citizens of different religions, or of no religion, responded to our many appearances on television and radio to publicize the restoration by sending in donations.

Yet with all of this assistance, we knew the bulk of the money would have to be raised from our own local Jewish community. As a result of intense efforts by our committee and many others, *every single member* of the community contributed to the restoration at least once, many twice and a few – three times. Of the project's ultimate cost (\$350,000) approximately half was raised within our own Victoria Jewish community. This is the largest amount ever given by our

community, and a startling sum when you consider the annual budget of our synagogue was only \$20,000 a few short years ago.

(If there are any generous souls out there, we are still \$15,000 short of the total funds required!) When we had managed to raise an initial \$100,000, we resolved to begin work. In April 1980 at a small ceremony, Premier Bill Bennett launched the Restoration Project.

With the stucco off, we discovered that the 11 different kinds of fancy shaped brick which were incorporated into the original facade had been knocked off to provide a flat surface for the stucco's adhesion. The massive central doors had been taken out and had disappeared. A similar fate had befallen the seven foot skylight.

With the invaluable assistance of consultants from the Heritage Conservation Branch of the Provincial Government we set to work to find the specialized materials, the skilled craftsman and artisans, the rare artifacts that were required to restore Emmanuel Synagogue to its beauty and character of 1863. We ended by using materials and the help of people from all over North America.

Our overriding purpose and fundamental goal was always a restoration of complete fidelity and authenticity. Testimony to the success of that goal was provided this past February when we were awarded a prize for the most significant heritage project in Greater Victoria by the Lieutenant- Governor in a ceremony at Government House.

For all of us who have worked on the restoration of our House of Worship, it was never a matter of dollars and cents or of bricks and mortar, although we spent countless hours and seemingly innumerable meetings dealing with these practical questions. It was a matter of keeping faith with our founders who had built so well over a century ago for the future of Jewish life on the West coast. It was a question of recreating the beauty and harmony of the sanctuary envisaged by our pioneers. It was also a way of contributing to the special historical character of our city that has taken particular pains to preserve its past and its heritage buildings.

Perhaps at the deepest level of our Jewish psyche, having survived as a people against all odds for 4,000 years, the restoration was a way of asserting that we are still capable of undertaking the improbably and succeeding, despite the forces arrayed against us.

To commemorate our success, we are re-enacting the ceremony of 119 years ago. On Sunday, June 6, 1982, there will be a procession throughout downtown Victoria. Led by a band, followed by the Congregation of the Synagogue and the ethnic societies, we will parade to the Masonic Temple where a thousand Masons will be waiting to join us. All together we will march to the synagogue site arriving at 2 p.m. where we will re-enact the ceremonies of 119 years ago.

The Premier of the Province, Chief Justice Nathan Nemetz, the Mayor of Victoria, and Dave Barrett, Leader of the Opposition, have all graciously consented to speak during ceremonies. Rabbi W. Solomon and the Choir of Beth Israel Synagogue in Vancouver will participate in the planned events.

Once again, we have invited all of Victoria and our friends from Vancouver to turn out to share our pride in our restored and resplendent synagogue.

During the four years of the Restoration, with the several benefit concerts we organized and frequent television and radio appearances, the history of the Jewish Community and Emanuel synagogue have become well known. As chairman of the committee to restore Canada's oldest synagogue, I have been invited and have spoken to over two dozen different groups ranging in size from 13 to 300 and including Rotary Club, Women's Canadian Club, United Church Women, classes of school children and associations for seniors.

To acknowledge the contribution of different Church groups – in the same way we received donations 119 years ago – we held open House at the synagogue on two separate evenings, inviting Christian Clergy and lay people. Two hundred and fifty came on evening and nearly 400 the second, so many, indeed, that we had to turn a few away. Most had never been in a synagogue before. These were memorable evenings both for the honesty of the discussion and the warmth and genuine appreciation that emanated from our invited visitors. An unanticipated by-product of our Restoration effort has certainly been to educate and build bridges to the Christian community.

My first glimpse of this took place over a year ago when I addressed the Women's Canadian Club. Afterwards a woman came up to tell me she was so proud of our restored synagogue. And then embarrasses, she apologized and said, "Of course, I mean your synagogue."

I assured that it was not only the Jewish Community's synagogue but also that it had been our (meaning all of Victoria's) synagogue 119 years ago and it surely was again. Moreover, we hold that it is a vital part of the national patrimony of all Canadian Jewry and indeed that it belongs to Canadians of every faith who cherish our past.

We believe that if, as Jews, we still await the coming of the Messiah, with the Restoration of Canada's oldest synagogue, Victoria is more than ever – outside of Israel – the best place to wait. Come and wait with us, and especially attend the festivities this Sunday, June 6, when we believe that we will be hastening His coming.



Interior of Synagogue Emanu-El, circa 1900 [British Columbia Archives C-08952]

The time capsule beneath the stone laid by Mr. Malowanski for the Congregation Emanu-El Synagogue contained:

- List of subscribers to lot
- Constitution of Chevra Bikur Cholim Ukedusha
- List of members of Germania Sing Verein and French Benevolent Society
- The Constitution of the Congregation
- A copy of the British Colonist, 2 June 1863
- Copies of contemporary newspapers of the day
- Coins
- List of subscribers to the Synagogue and its officers and members
- The time capsule beneath the stone laid by the Masonic Fraternity contained:
 - A scroll commemorating the participation of the Masonic Community in the cornerstone laying event of the Synagogue
 - By-laws of the Victoria Masonic Lodges

13 September 1863 saw the completion of the Synagogue and its dedication at which the first rabbi, Dr. M. Cohen, delivered the sermon. On 3 November 1863, the Building Committee Chairman reported that the Synagogue had been completed at a cost of \$9,195.00.



Synagogue Emanu-El, circa 1900 [British Columbia Archives C-09022]

Building History

The building was designed by noted architects Wright & Sanders in the Romanesque Revival style, a style favoured, during the nineteenth century, as an appropriate expression of Jewish culture and spirituality, and reputedly modelled on synagogues in New York City and in Poland. This was the first architect-designed brick religious building in the city and demonstrates the community's commitment to both its place of worship and to the establishment of a permanent community in Victoria.



John Wright, 1906 [British Columbia Archives F-01711]



George Hipsley Sanders, 1866 [British Columbia Archives H-00838]

Synagogue Emanu-El is one of the primary surviving works of the long-term partnership of Wright & Sanders. John Wright arrived in Victoria in 1858, and entered into a partnership with George H. Sanders, who moved to Victoria in 1861. Together, Wright & Sanders soaked up the major governmental, institutional, commercial and domestic commissions in the two west coast colonies. Despite their success in British Columbia, they sought a brighter future in northern California. Then followed a brilliant thirty-year career covering San Francisco's boom years during which the Wright & Sanders partnership produced a stream of large and prestigious buildings for the Bay area. Sadly, the majority of their work was destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. It is therefore with some irony that Wright & Sanders's largest architectural legacy is their surviving early work in Victoria.

Wright was born on May 15, 1830 at Killearn, Scotland, a small village near Loch Lomond. His parents died when he was a young child, leaving him to be raised by his grandparents and unmarried aunts. He immigrated to Guelph, Ontario in 1845 to live with cousins, and there he learned carpentry and engineering. There are references to John Wright as a builder and contractor in Guelph, and from 1856-58 he acted as Inspector of Works on the new city hall designed by William Thomas. This may have constituted the major part of Wright's architectural training. In 1858, Wright married Agnes Scott Armstrong, who bore him a large family of ten children. Wright correctly gauged that, as gold fever and the consequent expanding economy filled the city with transient workers, its shacks and shelters were bound to be replaced with more permanent structures. On June 24, 1859 he called for tenders for the construction of his first known commission in Victoria, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, a Gothic structure with a one hundred and twenty foot tower.

In 1860, Wright formed a partnership with George Sanders, who was born in Canada on August 2, 1838 after his family emigrated from England. Wright seems to have acted as the firm's chief designer, and remained more in the public eye. Sanders likely handled most of the business aspects and management of the firm. The partnership was immediately successful, and lasted until Wright's retirement in 1895. In addition to their work on Vancouver Island, Wright and the firm received a number of commissions in the mainland colony, especially New Westminster, between 1860 and 1866.

Various strains of Wright's eclectic stylistic palette were evident in major commissions over the next few years. For the First Presbyterian congregation in Victoria, Wright, who was a trustee, designed a wood frame Gothic church. The cornerstone was laid 9 April 1863, and the church opened its doors for divine service just seven months later. The Jewish synagogue, Emanu-El, was a substantial and sophisticated essay in the Romanesque Revival, also built in 1863. One of the firm's last projects before leaving Victoria was Angela College for the Anglican Diocese. Although only partially built, the published scheme was a sophisticated red-brick collegiate Gothic essay that showed full awareness of the latest trends in the English Gothic Revival movement. Well-placed civil servants and wealthy businessmen commissioned Wright's architectural skills, and the firm also designed a steady stream of fine residences for Victoria's elite. Wright & Sanders designed an Italianate villa Woodlands in James Bay, c.1861, for ex-Hudson's Bay Company official, James Bissett, and the original wing of Point Ellice House, c.1862. Residential work in this style was to reach its apogee in the Richard Carr house of 1863-64.

In 1866, Wright visited San Francisco for the first time. He noted the incredible growth in the Bay area, and in particular the coming of the American transcontinental railroad, scheduled for completion by 1869. In late 1866, Wright and his large family, and Sanders, moved to San Francisco. It proved a canny business decision to relocate their architectural practice. Wright & Sanders were immediately successful in obtaining large commercial and institutional commissions, and rapidly became leaders in the local architectural profession. The Wright & Sanders office remained open until 1900, when Wright retired, and then Sanders advertised himself as being in independent practice in 1901. John Wright watched as much of his life's work was consumed in the fires that followed the great San Francisco earthquake, or was dynamited to stop the spread of conflagration. In the summer of 1915 Wright decided to visit Canada again.

He became ill while crossing from Seattle to Victoria where he intended to meet friends en route to Ontario. He died in the Jubilee Hospital on 23 August 1915. George Sanders died on January 24, 1920 at the age of eighty-one.

Of Wright & Sanders's California work, only a few early churches survive, along with the Lick Observatory, built in the 1880s on Mount Hamilton in the Diablo Range east of San Jose, and the recently-restored San Francisco Theological Seminary. In Victoria, a number of Wright & Sanders's buildings form the core of the City's protected architectural heritage. Richard Carr House and Synagogue Emanu-El are national historic sites. Carr and Point Ellice houses are operated as provincial heritage attractions. Woodlands, Angela College, and Fairfield are municipally designated heritage sites. The early work of Wright & Sanders in Victoria was a strong and convincing demonstration of the architectural talent that would mature and flourish after their departure for California.

By the Act of the Colonial Legislature, Congregation Emanu-El of Victoria was incorporated on 7 July 1864. "The Emanu-El of Victoria, Vancouver Island," was passed by "The Governor, on Her Majesty's behalf, by and with the consent and advice of the Legislature Council and Assembly of Vancouver Island," with the object of "carrying into effect the fulfillment of the Ordinances of the Israelitish persuasion according to the orthodox order."



ANNO VICESIMO SEPTIMO ET VICESIMO OCTAVO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

No. XIX.

An Act to incorporate the Israelite Congregation named "The Emanuel of Victoria, Vancouver Island."

WHEREAS a Congregation of Israelites of the City of Victoria being desirous of fulfilling the Ordinances of their Religion, have formed themselves into a Congregation under the Style of "The Emanuel of Victoria, Vancouver Island," and have established certain Rules and Articles embodied in Articles of Constitution for their Government: Be it therefore enacted by the Governor, on Her Majesty's Behalf, by and with the Consent and Advice of the Legislative Council and Assembly of Vancouver Island and its Dependencies, as follows:

I. That the existing Members of the said Congregation, and all such Persons as from Time to Time hereafter may become the Members of the same according to the Articles of Constitution aforesaid, or any Articles of Constitution for the Time being in Force under the said Constitution, shall be a Body politic and corporate in Deed and in Law, by the Name of "The Emanuel of Victoria, Vancouver Island," for carrying into Effect the Fulfillment of the Ordinances of the Israelitish Persuasion according to the orthodox Order, and shall for all legal Purposes be known by such Appellation, and shall have a corporate Seal, with the Name of the said Corporation imprinted thereon, in the Words following: "The Emanuel of Victoria, Vancouver Island," and shall be governed by such Articles of Constitution as may be for the Time subsisting by virtue of the said Constitution.

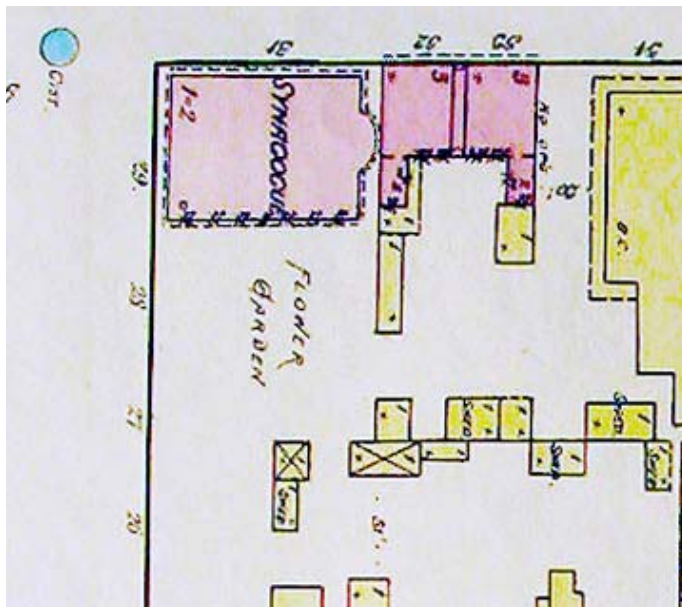
II. That a Copy of the Articles of Constitution aforesaid, shall be deposited with the Colonial Secretary, verified by the President and Secretary of the said Congregation, within fourteen days from the passage of this Act, and that a copy of any

Received my Assent this 7th day of July, 1864.

A. E. KENNEDY,
GOVERNOR.

VICTORIA, VANCOUVER ISLAND:
PRINTED BY AUTHORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT BY HARRIS AND COMPANY.
1864.

Act incorporating Congregation Emanu-El, Victoria, 1864 [City of Victoria Archives]



Victoria Fire Insurance Map 1885 [detail]

Later History of the Synagogue

The Synagogue continued to struggle for a few years to pay off the original mortgage. The construction of this building had demonstrated an ambitious vision, but the economy went bust after the gold rush days and a local depression set in during the mid-1860s.

THE JEWISH SYNAGOGUE – The Jewish Synagogue is advertised for sale by order of the mortgagee. Some \$3,000 of indebtedness remains to be cleared off, and the Congregation Emanu-El purpose [sic] raising that amount, if possible, by subscription from members of all denominations. To attain this desirable end Messrs. H.M. Cohen, Lewis Lewis, D. Shirpser and F.W. Keyser have been appointed a committee to wait on our citizens and solicit pecuniary aid. We hope that the application will not be in vain. The Synagogue was erected principally by public subscription, and it would be a pity to see the fine building pass into strange hands and the congregation deprived of the means of obtaining spiritual comfort and instruction. We therefore hope that an earnest effort will be put forth to raise the \$3,000 and place the society in a position of independence. The *British Colonist*, September 24, 1866, page 3.

The fundraising was ultimately successful, and the debt for construction of the building was paid off two years later.

THE SYNAGOGUE – It is gratifying to learn that the last instalment of the indebtedness upon this building was paid off this week. The mortgage, with interest, amounted to more than \$3,000, and the debt was incurred in times of our prosperity. It speaks well for the fidelity of the few left amongst us, who worship in the Synagogue, that the larger amount

of the indebtedness upon it, should have been discharged during the most trying period of our depression.

The *British Colonist*, 10 September 1866, page 3.

After Confederation, the local economy picked up again briefly, then slumped again. Prosperity returned later in the century, with the arrival of the transcontinental railway in Vancouver. In 1891, a wood-frame structure was proposed for the south side of the Synagogue to provide a hall and schoolroom.

"Doubly Useful"

Plans for the new buildings on Blanshard street, in connection with the Jewish synagogue, have been prepared by Messrs. Hooper & Goddard, and are now complete. They provide for a handsome two-story residence for the Rabbi, adjoining the Emanu-El Synagogue, with basement premises, to be used as a school-room and social hall. Tenders for the construction of the building will probably be invited in a month's time. Preparations are now well underway for the bazaar in aid of the building fund, which will be given by the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society, in Philharmonic Hall, on the 20th and 21st inst."

Victoria Daily Colonist, Thursday, 7 May 1891, page 5.

The Synagogue School: The committee appointed by the congregation Emanu-El to carry out the school project were on Sunday last authorized to proceed with their work. They submitted plans from a local architect, which were generally approved, and they were requested to advertise for tenders, so that the building operations might be commenced forthwith.

A Jewish Festival: On Sunday evening next, one of the most interesting of the Jewish festivals will be celebrated at the Synagogue. The date has been made the occasion of a general public gathering, and the Sunday school children will be publicly examined in the Jewish ritual by Rev. Dr. Philo, the rabbi. There will also be an address by the president, Dr. David Hart. It is understood that the collection will be in aid of the Royal Jubilee hospital. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 December 1892, page 5.

The tender call was placed in the *Colonist* of December 16th, 1892 by architect Thomas Hooper, with a closing date of December 22nd.

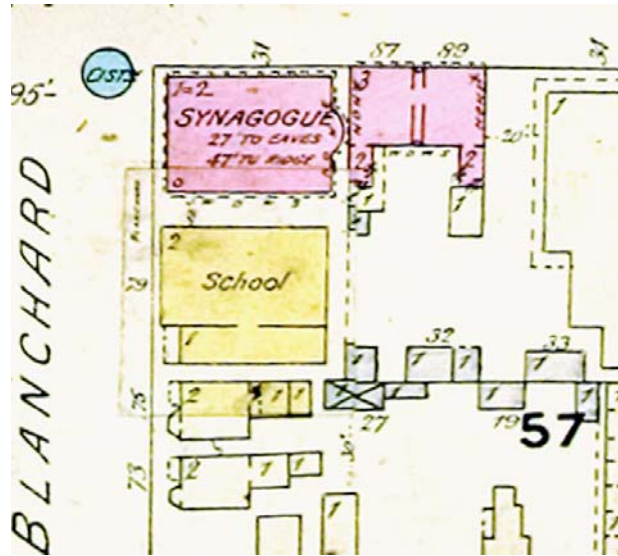
The Synagogue School House: The tenders for the erection of a school house in connection with the Synagogue were opened yesterday by the building committee and Contractor Riddle awarded the job. His price is in the neighbourhood of \$2,000. Work will be commenced without delay.

Victoria Daily Colonist, 28 December 1892, page 5.

In addition to completing the school structure in 1893, the congregation decided to spend \$500 on the "repair and beautifying" of the Synagogue. Again, the local economy collapsed, and the

school structure was used only briefly by the Congregation; it is shown on the 1903-07 Fire Insurance Map as the Calvary Baptist Church [Gospel Hall]. It was demolished in 1969.

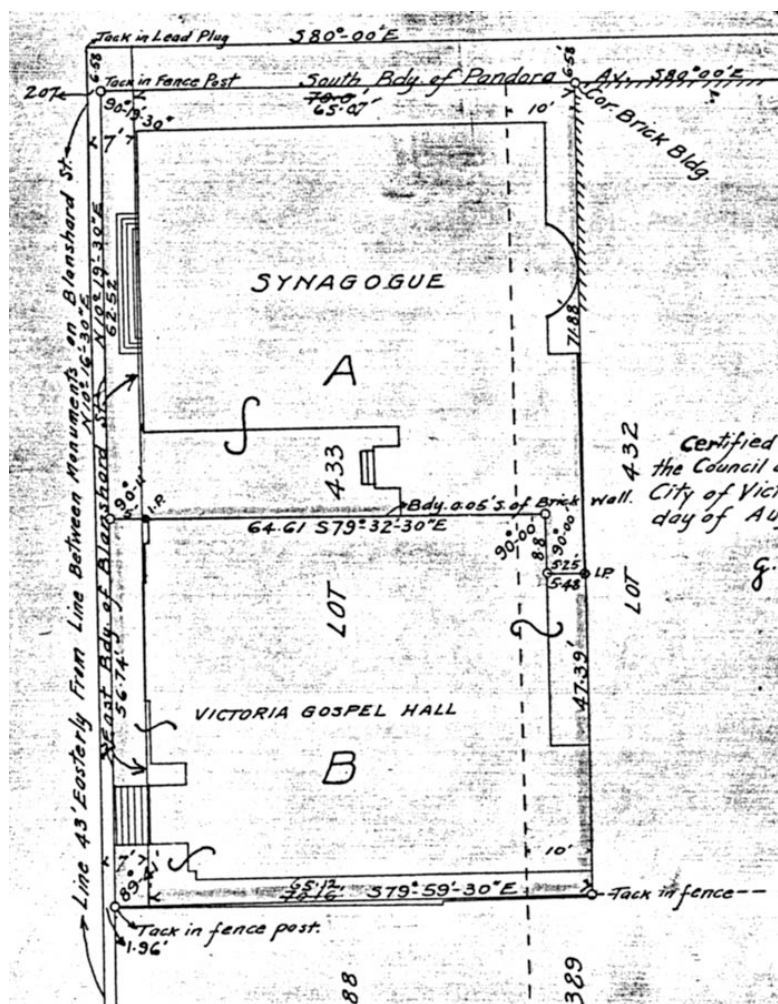
About 1900, a small brick addition was built to the southeast corner of the Synagogue to provide a kitchen and vestry. This small structure was extended forward to the streetline in 1948 when the Synagogue was modernized.



Victoria Fire Insurance Map 1891 [amended after 1891: detail]



School adjoining Synagogue Emanu-El, 1940s [City of Victoria Archives M-08659]



Plan, Synagogue and Victoria Gospel Hall, 1928 [City of Victoria]

The Victoria Jewish community remained fairly static and small in size. Its numbers climbed gradually to about 150 by 1900, then dropped off to about 100 by the 1920s and 1930s. On July 4, 1921, the Congregation received a visit from the Very Reverend Dr. J.H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Mr. Albert M. Wolfe O.B.E., Vice-President of the United Synagogues and Mr. A.H. Valentine, Secretary. A public reception was held for them at the Empress Hotel on the next day.



Interior of Synagogue Emanu-El, circa 1930 [British Columbia Archives C-08951]

Restoration of the Synagogue

The number of Jewish families in the city diminished and by the 1940s there were only seven in the congregation, and the cost of maintaining and heating the building became unsupportable. Members of the congregation remember the pot-bellied stove that attempted to heat the interior. The decision was made to close off parts of the interior and insulate the building envelope by blocking up windows and doors, and cladding the exterior with stucco.



Synagogue Emanu-El in 1957 [British Columbia Archives I-26564]



Synagogue Emanu-El after modernization [City of Victoria]

The synagogue was "modernized" in 1948 at a cost of \$14,000. On the exterior, all the windows on the north wall, facing Pandora Street, and the west wall, facing Blanshard Street, were blocked off with hollow tiles. On the main facade the three solid-wood main doors were sold to finance the changes, and two doors flanking the central opening were closed off; any projecting bricks on the three sides that were to be stuccoed, were chiselled off to create a flat surface. The exterior, except the east wall, the windowless sanctuary end, was coated in stucco. The balcony flooring was unsafe, and as it was not needed for the dwindling congregation it was closed off. On the interior, a false ceiling was installed at the level of the closed-off balcony, creating a small, dark interior, but one that was much easier to maintain and heat; the pot-bellied stove that had heated the interior was removed and a small furnace room constructed on the south wall. The seven-foot diameter skylight at the top of the vaulted ceiling was removed and boarded up. In addition, a false ceiling was dropped into place, concealing the traditional galleries. A rededication ceremony at the Emanu-El Synagogue was held on March 17, 1948.

The synagogue remained in its windowless, stuccoed cocoon for over thirty years. This radical modification ensured the survival of the building as well as the Jewish community in Victoria; a community that thirty years later was vibrant and committed enough to undertake the gargantuan effort of returning the building to its former glory. The postwar economic boom, expansion of government services, and establishment of a university, brought a population increase to Victoria.

The congregation grew to over 100 families. On 12 November 1971, Emil Klein was asked to serve as rabbi for the Congregation Emanu-El, the first rabbi to serve the Congregation in 30 years. For the approximate 75 families the Synagogue served in 1972, it continued to be the centre of Jewish religious activity in Victoria that it was for the 35 original members in 1863.

A new attitude prevailed, and in the Times, 21 February 1976, p. 15, an article titled 'Jewish Historical Society Studies Synagogue Restoration' described a vision for the restoration of the building. This was also the time that there was a new public appreciation of heritage. In 1977, the provincial Heritage Conservation Branch was founded, responsible for the planning and management of provincial heritage resources. The Branch's Restoration Services Division would play a crucial role in the synagogue restoration. In 1978, "The Committee to Restore Canada's Oldest Synagogue" was organized. The project of revitalizing the Synagogue included: removing old paint and stucco; duplicating antique bricks of irregular shapes; recreating doors; shipping stained glass from Europe; remaking hundreds of elaborate spindles for the gallery railing and restoring a rose window that could not be removed from the wall. Although some of the fabric of the building, such as the doors, was lost forever, the blocked-off windows were not lost, and much of the interior that was shut away by the false ceiling survived.

The restoration was made possible by the support of various organizations including the British Columbia Heritage Trust. Every effort was made to restore the Synagogue as authentically as possible, for example: new bricks, to replace those defaced in preparation for the stucco, were hand made by the Hidden Brick Company in Vancouver, Washington; hundreds of new spindles for the balcony were hand turned by David's Classic Wood-Works, of Victoria; and local stained-glass artist, Andrew Leone, repaired and recreated the windows and dome. The new stained glass in the ceiling was supported on Plexiglas, with a rectangular glass structure on top to protect it, and allow for inspection. The wooden floor was dug out and a skim coat of concrete placed on the exposed ground before the new floor was installed.

Commitment to authenticity led the Heritage Branch to petition the Fire Marshall to make concessions concerning the provision of facilities in compliance with the current code. Both the interior and exterior of the synagogue today would, it seems, be instantly recognisable to the Jewish citizens of Victoria who worshipped there one hundred and fifty years ago.

On June 26, 1983, the Government of Canada mounted a plaque recognizing the "national historical and architectural significance of Congregation Emanu-El Temple."



Synagogue Emanu-El after Restoration, 1985 [British Columbia Archives I-04856]

In 1994, the Board of the Congregation Emanu-El established a Task Force to examine the possibility of expanding the Synagogue. A Building Committee was formed upon the vote of the Board, tasked with the responsibility of securing conceptual drawings and any technical studies or surveys required to assess the options of constructing an addition to the Synagogue. The addition to the Synagogue became the Matanah G'Dolah Project and was the Capital Building and Fundraising Campaign of Congregation Emanu-El. In 2003, the project was realized when an addition to the south of the Synagogue was opened.

Temple Emanu-El (עמנואל): History Summary



Emanu-El and the Matanah G'Dolah addition.

Temple Emanu-El (עמנואל): History Summary



Viewed from Pandora



Early Interior



Current Interior



Close up of rose window

Chronology

1858

The first Jews arrive in Victoria at the time of the Fraser River gold rush. High Holy Day services are held in a private home on Johnson Street in the Fall.

1859

The Victoria Hebrew Benevolent Society is founded.

1860

A Jewish Cemetery is consecrated on Cedar Hill Road, the oldest in Western Canada. Selim Franklin is elected to the Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island, the third Jew to be elected to a legislature in British North America.

1861

Morris Price, murdered at Cayoosh (Lillooet), becomes the first person to be interred in the Jewish Cemetery.

1862

The Congregation “Emanu-El of Victoria, Vancouver Island” is officially formed. It purchases a piece of land, “suitable in all respects for \$730.00” for a future Synagogue. A call for architects is issued.

1863

Architects Wright & Sanders issue a tender call for the new building. Contracts are issued to Mr. T. Baker for brick and slating, and Lee & Co. for the stonework. The cornerstone is laid in a grand public ceremony on June 2nd. Consecration occurs in September.

1864

A wedding canopy made of silk from China, manufactured in England and transported around Cape Horn to Victoria is presented to the Congregation by the Hebrew Ladies of Victoria.

1866

Lumley Franklin, Selim’s brother, is elected the second mayor of Victoria, the first Jewish mayor of a city in British North America.

1871

Henry Nathan Jr. is sent as one of the first two Members of Parliament from Victoria after Confederation. He becomes the first Jew to sit in the Canadian House of Commons.

1891

Plans are prepared for the construction of a Sunday School and Hall to the south of the Synagogue.

1892

Architect Thomas Hooper issues a tender call for the school house. The construction contract is given to Mr. Riddle in December.

1893

The school house opens.

1948

The Synagogue is “modernized”; the exterior is covered in stucco, the central doors are removed, a false ceiling is placed in the interior, the windows are blocked up and the central skylight is removed.

1976

Consideration given to the restoration of the Synagogue.

1978

“The Committee to Restore Canada’s Oldest Synagogue” is organized and consists of Martin Levin as Chairman with a membership of Harry Brown, Neil Gold, Michael Goldberg, Alan Klenman, Ben Levinson, Gene Miller, Felix Reuben and later Martin Bernstein. The Committee enlists the aid and expertise of the Heritage Conservation Branch of the Provincial Government which is to prove invaluable throughout the four year restoration project.

1979

The B.C. Heritage Trust announces a grant of \$50,000 to the restoration of the Synagogue. Ultimately, the Trust gives \$82,000 to the Synagogue. The Annual General Meeting of the Congregation unanimously approves the restoration project. Fund-raising is launched. Every single member of the Synagogue contributes to the restoration producing the largest amount ever raised in Victoria.

1980

In April, Premier William Bennett officially launches the restoration.



Marvin Levin at the Synagogue, 1981,
Vancouver Sun



Premier Bennett and Martin Levin, 1980 *Victoria Times*

1982

The completion of the restoration is celebrated with a re-enactment of the events of 1863 with a procession, the ethnic societies, the Masons and Provincial and Civic dignitaries. Again the City of Victoria turns out for the occasion. The final cost of the restoration is \$367,000.

The congregation received three awards for the restoration:

1. The Hallmark Society Award (a local award)
2. Heritage Canada Award (a national award)
3. American Association for State and Local History Award (a North American award)

1983

The Canadian Government designates the Synagogue a site of national historic significance.

1994

The Board of the Congregation voted unanimously in favour of establishing a Task Force to assess the Building Options available to the congregation. A Building Committee is formed.

1995

A community meeting was held and those in attendance supported the concept of building next to the schul; schematic drawings for a new addition to the Synagogue are created.

2003

The addition to the Synagogue became the Matanah G'Dolah Project and was the Capital Building and Fundraising Campaign of Congregation Emanu-El. In 2003, the project was realized when an addition to the south of the Synagogue was opened.

2013

Celebration of the sesquicentennial of the Synagogue.

City Of Victoria Statement Of Significance

Description of Historic Place

Congregation Emanu-el is a one and one-half storey brick Romanesque Style synagogue on the corner of Blanshard and Pandora Streets.

Heritage Value

Congregation Emanu-el is valued as the oldest surviving synagogue in Canada, and as an early expression of Jewish spiritual, social, cultural and educational life in Victoria. Notably, this synagogue has been in continuous use since its dedication in 1863. Commissioned by Jewish immigrants, most of whom arrived in Victoria from San Francisco during the Fraser River Gold Rush period, this building is the most significant representation of the permanent establishment of the Jewish community in the city and in British Columbia. Congregation Emanu-el is a testament to the devotion and resourcefulness of its founders, and a monument to the confidence of the early Jewish community which this place continues to instill in its modern congregation.

Architecturally, this is a rare example of a 19th century Romanesque Style synagogue in Canada. The significance of this building is expressed in such architectural elements as the rounded arch forms, rose windows, corbelled brickwork, Romanesque capitals on columns and pilasters, and corner pavilions. Designed by one of Victoria's first architects, John Wright, the exterior design and interior elements such as the gallery, the Bema, and the Holy Ark of the synagogue combine to create a unique expression of the culture, values, and spirituality of the Jewish community since the mid-nineteenth century.

Character-Defining Elements

The character-defining elements of Congregation Emanu-el include:

- the unobstructed views of the building along Blanshard and Pandora Streets;
- the prominent situation of the building at a busy corner, and the setback from the sidewalk;
- the distinctive temple, or place of worship building form;
- the red brick exterior;
- the intact Romanesque Revival Style exterior details, such as the round-arched windows and blind arcades, tripartite entrance with two decorated columns and flanking piers, varnished wood front doors, front facade rose window, heavy bracketed cornice, corner pavilions, and mansard and peaked roofs;
- the intact interior spaces, materials, and religious features such as the sanctuary, arched vaulted nave and galleries, the Bema, the Holy Ark, the skylight, stained glass windows, and patterned floors.

Research Sources

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<<http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/exhibits/timemach/galler06/frames/synagog.htm>>

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Stiefel, Barry and Goodwin, George M. 'Three New World Synagogues: Preserved Symbols of Toleration, Pride and Continuity.' *The Scribe*, Vol.XXI, 2009, pages 27-44.

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Leona Taylor and Dorothy Mindenhall, "Index of Historical Victoria Newspapers," *Victoria's Victoria*, <http://www.victoriasvictoria.ca/>, 2007.

The body of M. Price, a highly respected citizen of Cayoosh, British Columbia, recently murdered by Indians at that place, will be brought to Victoria, Vancouver Island and interred with Jewish rites. [Price was the first interment at the Jewish Cemetery; articles about this murder throughout Mar issues]. Apr 11 - Ad - Morris Price, Deceased, Notice to Debtors/Creditors. Masonic funeral - May 6; see May 7, 3. [British Colonist, 1861-03-25]

Notice to Architects - premium of \$50 will be awarded for plan of a Jewish synagogue [Victoria Daily Chronicle, 1862-12-10, p. 2]

Tender call, Wright & Sanders, synagogue [Victoria Daily Chronicle, 1863-02-14, p. 3]

Synagogue contracts - brick and slating Mr. T. Baker; stonework Lee & Co. cost to be \$11, 242 [Victoria Daily Chronicle, 1863-03-05, p. 3]

THE SYNAGOGUE, laying foundation stone with full Masonic ceremony, band of HMS Topaze etc. [Victoria Daily Chronicle, 1863-05-30, p. 3]

Laying the Foundation Stone of Hebrew Synagogue... [*British Colonist*, 1863-06-03, p. 3]

Consecration of Jewish Synagogue... [*British Colonist*, 1863-09-14, p. 3]

Jewish Synagogue advertised for sale by order of mortgagee. [*British Colonist*, 1866-09-24, p. 3]

THE SYNAGOGUE, last of mortgage paid off, item praises congregation for discharging the debt "during the most trying period of our depression" [*Colonist*, 1868-09-10, p. 3]

Tender call for painting &c. Jewish Synagogue and Jewish Cemetery Fence, specifications at Mr. Lewis Lewis' store, Yates St. [*Colonist*, 1871-05-09, p. 2]

Lewis Samuel, who arrived on the Chester from San Francisco, California, and who has been lying ill at the Clarence, died May 10, 1887, aged 60. Deceased was a prominent merchant of Toronto, and president of the Jewish synagogue there. His remains will be taken in charge by the Hebrew society of Victoria, British Columbia until Mr Rosenbaum, his Son-in-law, arrives from San Francisco. Deceased had pre-purchased a ticket for return to Toronto by Canadian Pacific Railway...'his friends now claim that the company are compelled to take him back either dead or alive.'... [*Colonist*, 1887-05-07]

Doubly Useful - Plans for new building in connexion with Jewish Synagogue being prepared by Hooper & Goddard [*Colonist*, 1891-05-07, p. 5]

The Synagogue School - local architect [*Colonist*, 1892-12-13, p. 5]

Tender call, Thomas Hooper, Hall & School room on vacant lot next Jew's Synagogue on Blanchard [*Colonist*, 1892-12-16, p. 1]

The Synagogue School - tenders in, no decision, architect Thomas Hooper [*Colonist*, 1892-12- 24, p. 5]

The Synagogue School House - contract to Riddle for around \$2,000 [*Colonist*, 1892-12-28, p. 5]

Improvements to Synagogue [*Colonist*, 1893-02-17, p. 5]

Jewish Synagogue is 60 yrs old... [Times *Colonist*, 1924-04-20, p. 12]

Jewish Historical Society Studies Synagogue Restoration' [Victoria *Times*, 21 February, 1976, p.15]

'Rot-Gut Liquor fuelled Fur Trade'; 'Jews were Fur Trade Pioneers', both articles by Chris Hanna. [Times *Colonist*, 12 June 1994, M4, M2]

Appendix: 1979 Historic Sites And Monuments Board Of Canada: Agenda Paper

1979 30

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

AGENDA PAPER

TITLE: Congregation Emanuel Temple, 1461 Blanshard Street,
Victoria, British Columbia

SOURCE: Edward Mills, Historian, CIHB
Leslie Maitland, Architectural Analyst, CIHB

Historical Report

Who would have thought that in the short space of five years we should have a temple erected where aborigines were then lords of the domain? Who would have dreamt that in this isolated part of the globe, where, ere now, feet of white men have hardly trod, a comparatively large city would spring up, studded with magnificent edifices and inhabited by a large concourse of intellectual people? Who would not have ridiculed the idea that where, ere now, naught but the hunter's step and wild beast's roar disturbed the wilderness, should at this early day be erected a synagogue to the scattered tribes of Israel?¹

The occasion of the above address was the laying of the cornerstone for the Congregation Emanuel Temple in Victoria, Vancouver Island. The date was June 2, 1863. Construction of a permanent brick synagogue was an auspicious event for the local Jewish community, then barely five years in existence and composed of fewer than fifty members. The feat was a reflection both of the group's resourcefulness and of the influence and respect which it commanded within Victoria despite its small size.

Victoria's Jewish community was established in 1858. Members were primarily of English, Austrian, German and Polish origin, and in fact formed elements of larger contingents from those countries. Most, if not all, had migrated first to California during its gold rush period during the late 1840s and early 1850s, before moving north to Victoria upon the discovery of gold on the Fraser River.² Unlike the majority of fortune seekers converging on the community, they were motivated less by the quest for gold than by the potential markets for supplies and services which the rush would generate. Many enjoyed well-

established connections with San Francisco-based firms which enabled them to quickly capture a substantial proportion of the mercantile trade in the colony.³ The early Jewish group consequently assumed an economic importance considerably out of proportion to its numerical size, which does not appear to have exceeded 100 even at the height of the Fraser River and Cariboo rushes.⁴ Nor was this influence confined to Victoria. A number of Jewish entrepreneurs proceeded inland to the gold fields where they established outfitting firms, the most notable example being the famed Oppenheimer Brothers who opened a store at Yale in 1859, then quickly expanded into Fort Hope, Lytton, Williams Creek and Barkerville.⁵

As the principal port and distribution centre for the colonies, Victoria attracted and retained the majority of Jewish arrivals during this period. It was consequently the only location at which a concerted effort was made to organize a permanent congregation. Initial steps occurred in May, 1859, when meetings were held to acquire a site for a Jewish burying ground and to establish the First Hebrew Benevolent Society.⁶ Establishment of the present reform Congregation Emanuel followed in 1862.⁷ Regular religious services were held in various rented quarters while plans were made for the construction of a permanent synagogue. Victoria was then riding the crest of the gold rush boom, and the congregation's plans clearly anticipated a rapid increase in size. Its current membership was then listed as 49, many of whom were not permanent residents of the community, but the projected building was nevertheless designed to accommodate over 500 worshippers.⁸ By the fall of 1862 a suitable site had been purchased and a vigorous fund raising campaign was launched. The British Colonist endorsed the project with the following comment:

The Hebrews of Victoria are both numerous, wealthy and public spirited. They intend to erect a fine building on the corner of Government and Pandora Streets for a synagogue. The building will seat some 350 persons, and in its galleries perhaps 200 more. The lot is 60 feet by 200 feet on which it will be built. It is paid for already, and \$900 has been subscribed towards the Synagogue. A committee will shortly go around to take up subscriptions in aid of the object. We trust that a generous response will be made.⁹

The stature of Victoria's Jewish population was not limited to its economic influence. The town's remarkably cosmopolitan

population was reflected in the establishment of a wide variety of fraternal and ethnic organizations in which local Jews played prominent roles. Thus H.M. Cohen, manager of the Jewish Cemetery, was also vice-president of the French Benevolent Society, while H.F. Heisterman was president of the Germania Sing Verein. Jews were particularly active in the local chapter of the Masonic Lodge, Abraham Blackman, Eli Harrison and the afore-mentioned Heisterman all serving on the executive of that organization.¹⁰ The social prominence which Jews enjoyed in Victoria was perhaps without precedent in British North America, as was the financial and popular support which the congregation received for the construction of its synagogue. This support was vividly demonstrated on the occasion of the cornerstone laying ceremonies, presided over by the local Masons following a massed parade through the community. Participants included the clergy of most local Christian denominations, the band from H.M.S. Topaz, the Germania Sing Verein, the French Benevolent and St. Andrew's Societies, along with various local dignitaries including the major. The Colonist summarized the event with the following account:

Thus terminated an eventful day in the history of the Jews in Vancouver Island, and it must be a source of infinite gratification to that body, that the ceremonies of this day, partaking as they did of a purely denominational character, were participated in by all classes of our community with a hearty goodwill and brotherly feeling, evidenced in acts more powerful than words the high esteem in which they were held by their fellow townsmen of the City of Victoria.¹¹

Construction of the building proceeded rapidly. By September 14 it was ready for consecration,¹² although it was not fully completed until November 3, 1863. In his report to the congregation on this occasion, the chairman of the building committee noted that the building had been executed as originally designed and that the finish and workmanship were satisfactory. Design of the Synagogue, along with supervision of its construction, was attributed to the prominent local firm of Wright and Saunders (see Architectural Report). The total cost was \$9,195, of which \$5,152 was owing in mortgages.¹³

The synagogue was in use for little more than a year before the gold rush boom ended and Victoria entered a period of prolonged recession. The fortunes of the local Jewish merchants and wholesalers suffered accordingly, and the Congregation Emanuel

found itself in financial difficulties. These reached crisis proportions by September, 1866, when the mortgage on the building came due.¹⁴ Once again a subscription drive was launched by congregation members and supported by the local press and public. The editor of the Colonist observed that the Synagogue had been erected "principally by public subscription, and it would be a pity to see the fine building pass into strange hands and the congregation deprived of the means of obtaining spiritual comfort..."¹⁵ By January, 1867, nearly one-third of the outstanding \$3,000 debt had been raised, a substantial amount coming from the Richfield-Barkerville area, suggesting that the Oppenheimer Brothers were actively supporting the cause.¹⁶ On September 10, 1868 the Colonist noted that the last installment had been paid, despite a continued drop in the size of the local congregation.¹⁷

Although the size of the Congregation declined after 1864, its membership continued to play a prominent role in the affairs of both Victoria and British Columbia. Of particular note was the success of local Jews in the political field. When Lumley Franklin assumed office as the third mayor of Victoria in 1866, it marked the first election of a Jew as a mayor in British North America. His brother Selim was elected to the Colonial Legislature in 1870, becoming the first Jew to sit in a Provincial Legislature when British Columbia joined Confederation in the following year.¹⁸ Henry Nathan in turn had the distinction of being the first Jew to sit on a Legislative Council in 1870, and subsequently participated in negotiations for union with Canada. He later sat as a Member of Parliament for Victoria as a member of the Macdonald government.¹⁹

The Victoria Jewish community remained fairly small and static in size. Its numbers climbed gradually to one hundred and fifty by the turn of the century, only to drop to around one hundred during the 1920s and 30s. The Synagogue is currently supported by eighty-two memberships constituting approximately two hundred people.²⁰ This lack of growth spared the building from the fate of replacement which befell other early synagogues as a result of rapid congregation expansion during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The building was maintained with no notable alterations until the 1940s when a succession of interior and exterior changes was made: a false ceiling was installed, destroying the original side balconies and obscuring the circular skylight and upper windows (see Figures 7 and 8). Most original pews were replaced around this time when theatre-type seating was installed. Exterior modifications consisted of

the closure of all windows on the Pandora Street facade, along with two doors and all windows on the Blanshard (front) facade. These were filled with hollow brick, whereupon the exterior brick walls were covered with a stucco veneer. A small one storey addition was added to the right side of the building to provide kitchen, office and furnace accommodations around the same time. The building remains structurally intact despite these alterations, and plans are currently afoot for its restoration.²¹

Concern for the restoration of the building is based both on its stature as a local landmark and upon the distinct niche it occupies in the history of Canadian Jewry. Permanent synagogues were rarities in Canada before the 1880s, those predating that decade being considered to fall within a "pioneer" phase in the process of Jewish settlement in Canada.²² The earliest instance of synagogue construction occurred in Montreal, where a Sephardic congregation of Portuguese Jews erected a building in 1777. No further examples occurred until the mid-19th century, when a succession of four were built by Reform (Ashkenazic ritual) congregations in Montreal, Hamilton, Victoria and Three Rivers.²³ The Victoria building is the sole survivor from this small group of early synagogues, making it the oldest surviving example in the country. Its stature is further enhanced by the dynamic roles its early congregation members assumed during the formative years of both Victoria and British Columbia. Current plans call for the restoration of the building's exterior to its original appearance with financial assistance from the provincial Heritage Trust. Further plans call for interior restoration, removal of the existing side addition and its replacement by a more sympathetic annex.

Endnotes

- 1 British Colonist (Victoria), 3 June 1863, p. 3.
- 2 Arthur Daniel Hart, The Jews in Canada, (Toronto and Montreal: Jewish Publications Ltd., 1926), p. 117. (hereafter cited as Jews in Canada)....
- 3 J.M.S. Careless, "The Business Community in Victoria," in Historical Essays on British Columbia, ed. J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 182.

- 4 I.J. Benjamin, Benjamin II on British Columbia, trans. Martin Wolff from Drei Jahre in America (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1940), p. 3.
- 5 Cyril Edel Leonoff, Pioneers, Pedlars and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978), pp. 54-5.
- 6 Colonist, (Victoria), 6 June 1859, p. 2.
- 7 The Congregation was subsequently incorporated by an Act of the Legislative Council on 7 July 1864.
- 8 Archives of British Columbia. Congregation Emanuel Records, 1862-1945, Vol. 1, folder 1, "Secretary's quarterly report, 29 June 1863". Membership figures varied considerably throughout the period, 49 being the highest estimate.
- 9 Colonist, (Victoria), 26 Nov. 1862, p. 3.
- 10 W.E. Ireland, "The Annexation Petition of 1869," British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. 4 (Oct. 1942), pp. 273, 278, 281.
- 11 Colonist, (Victoria), 3 June 1863, p. 3.
- 12 Colonist, (Victoria), 14 Sept. 1863, p. 3.
- 13 Congregation Emanuel Records, Vol. 1, folder 1, "First report of the Building Committee, 14 November 1863." The full extent of Wright and Sanders' involvement in the design is unclear. While the Building Committee credits the firm with supervision of its construction at a cost of \$337, another local architect named Richard Lewis participated in the cornerstone ceremonies as designer of the building, according to the Colonist's account of 3 June, 1863, suggesting that he may have played a major role in the actual design.
- 14 Colonist, (Victoria), 22 Sept. 1866, p. 3. The building was in fact offered for sale at this time.
- 15 Colonist, (Victoria), 24 Sept. 1866, p. 3.
- 16 Colonist, (Victoria), 18 Oct. 1866, p. 3.

- 17 Colonist, (Victoria), 10 Sept. 1868, p. 3.
- 18 He was not however the first Jew elected to a colonial legislature. This distinction is held by Ezekiel Hart, who was elected to the Assembly of Lower Canada in 1807.
- 19 Jews in Canada, p. 57; also David Rome, The Early Jewish Presence in Canada (Montreal: Bronfman Collection of Jewish Canadiana, 1971), p. 39. The latter source states: "...only the Pacific coast Jews appear frequently in the political arena in Canada."
- 20 British Columbia. Ministry of the Provincial Secretary, Research and Planning Division, "Report on the Jewish Synagogue, Victoria, B.C.," (unpublished mss, August 15, 1978), p. 3.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 3-5. I am indebted to Mr. Wm. Huot of the Research and Planning Division for the above report and additional material and information regarding restoration plans for the building.
- 22 Jews in Canada, p. 81. By 1926 there were 125 synagogues in Canada, all but those cited dating from the post-1880 period.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 83-117 passim.

Architectural Report

By national standards, the Congregation Emanuel Temple, (1863;¹ Figures 1, 2 and 3) is a modest essay in the Romanesque style, and a minor work by the architect who built it. Nevertheless, as the earliest surviving synagogue in the country, it is a valuable specimen of Canadian architecture.

The earliest building constructed as a synagogue was built in Montreal in 1777 by the Shearith Israel Congregation.² What this building looked like is unknown, although we have an illustration (Figure 4) of this congregation's later building, dedicated in 1838,³ showing a rare Canadian example of an Egyptian Revival style building.⁴ Other early synagogues were built by the English, German and Polish Jews of Montreal in 1860,⁵ in Toronto in 1876,⁶ and early in the nineteenth

century in Trois-Rivières (burnt 1860).⁷ After the 1880s, when Jews started to arrive in Canada in numbers, more synagogues appear; but the Congregation Emanuel is the only early survivor.

With the beginning of the revival styles in the nineteenth century, architects were faced with the problem of choosing an appropriate style for synagogue architecture from among the many possibilities. Something that fitted in with the architecture of the various host countries⁸, yet suited the needs of the Jewish communities was desired.⁹ The Gothic style was considered to be too closely linked with Christian Europe of the Middle Ages,¹⁰ an unhappy epoch for European Jews. A number of synagogues were built throughout the nineteenth century in the Egyptian Revival style,¹¹ although many Jews objected to the style because of its association with another difficult episode in their early history. The Moorish style found many adherents because the Jews had been well-treated in Islamic Spain. However, its bright colours and flamboyant forms seemed too foreign in France, England and Germany.¹² It was in this latter country through the writings and works of Auguste Schuchardt that the Romanesque Revival was adopted for synagogue architecture,¹³ as shown in the Kassel Synagogue of 1839 (Figure 5). From Germany, the Romanesque synagogue spread to England, France and North America, outshining in popularity all the other historical styles used for synagogues.

The revival of twelfth century Romanesque forms accompanied the revival of thirteenth and fourteenth century Gothic architecture. Features borrowed for contemporary use were round-headed window and door openings, generally with heavy mouldings and voussoirs, corbelled brick or stone under the eaves, buttressing, coloured brick and stonework, and decorative sculpture. Generally the Romanesque Revival stressed the solid and the heavy, having an earth-bound ponderousness unlike its light and soaring Gothic cousin. F.W. Cumberland's University College in Toronto (Figure 6; 1856) is certainly Canada's finest essay in a style that was popular for all types of buildings.

The Congregation Emanuel synagogue is a more modest version of the style. The characteristics of the Romanesque Revival exhibited here are round-headed windows accompanied by flat strip pilasters and corbelled brickwork under the eaves. With its corner pavilions, the synagogue also attempts the sense of weightiness of the Romanesque. Originally the building had a

rose window and triple-arched entranceway of twelfth century religious architecture (Figure 1), but these have since been covered over (Figure 3). The red brick has also been plastered, so that much of the original effect has been lost, although not irredeemably.

The interior (Figure 2) is lined on three sides with balconies facing the centre, and originally had a shallow dome with a skylight in the centre (Figure 7). Subsequent to the original construction, a false ceiling was put in cutting off the dome and galleries (Figure 8), but plans have been made to restore the interior to its original appearance.

The Architect

John Wright was an important early participant in Victoria's architectural history.¹⁴ Born in Killearn, Scotland in 1830, Wright arrived in Vancouver via San Francisco in 1859. His career in Victoria is marked by a number of fine buildings, including private residences such as Cloverdale (1859-60), Woodlands (1861), Fairfield House (Figure 9; 1871), the Emily Carr House (1863-4), and Pentrelew (1875). His other works include a Presbyterian church and various lighthouses and towers.¹⁵ Angela College (Figure 10; 1865)¹⁶ is his most ambitious work in the city. The synagogue is a fairly modest work compared to his picturesque private homes, which Segger and Franklin characterize as "drawn from Victorian versions of the rural Italianate villa (in the manner of A.J. Downing)".¹⁷ Wright returned to San Francisco in 1867 where he pursued a successful practice in partnership with architect George H. Saunders. Wright died in 1915.

Conclusion

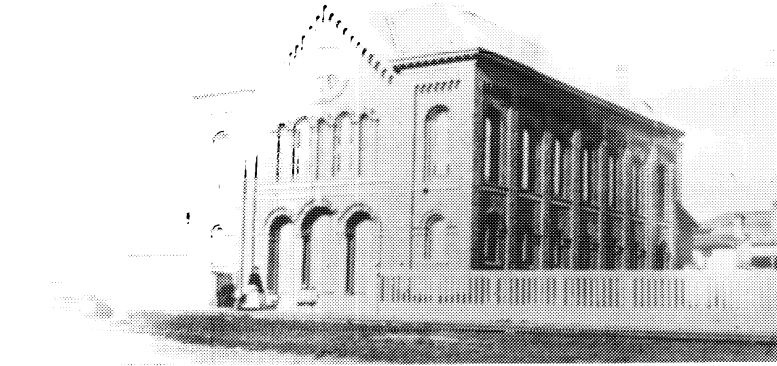
As the earliest surviving synagogue in Canada, the Congregation Emanuel Temple takes its place as one of the important buildings in Canada's architectural history. This is in spite of its modest representation of the Romanesque style, and of the architect involved. Happily the congregation and the Province of British Columbia have plans to restore the building in a joint project, and this important monument will survive.

Endnotes

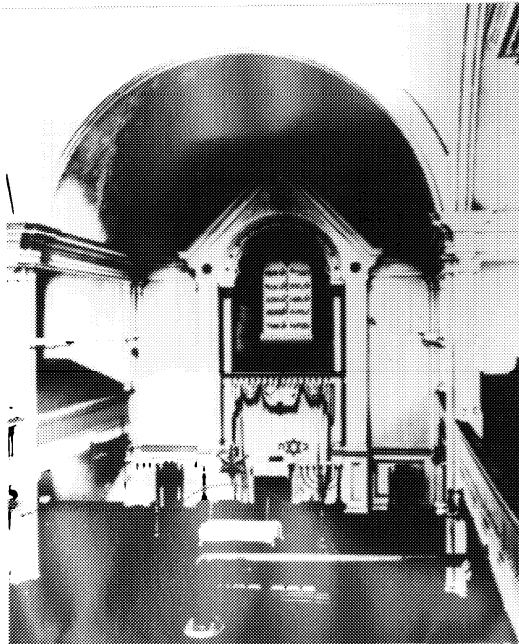
- 1 British Colonist (Victoria), 3 June 1863, p. 3.
- 2 Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Canada, Volume I: A History (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 42.
- 3 Ibid., p. 51.
- 4 A later example of an Egyptian Revival synagogue was the Searot Yisreal synagogue of Montreal, built in 1887-90 and demolished in 1960. Luc d'Iberville-Moreau, Lost Montreal (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 128.
- 5 B.G. Sack, History of the Jews in Canada (Montreal: Harvest House, 1965), p. 154 (hereafter cited as Jews in Canada)....
- 6 Sack and Stuart Rosenberg concur on the dates for these early synagogues, although Louis Rosenberg dates the first Toronto synagogue to 1845 and the first Montreal synagogue to 1846. Louis Rosenberg, Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), p. 10.
- 7 Jews in Canada, p. 153.
- 8 Helen Rosenau, "The Synagogue and Protestant Church Architecture," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 4 (1941), p. 80.
- 9 Cyril Leonoff notes that "While it cannot be claimed that the Jews had a distinctive architectural style, their building techniques were a blending of their building experiences in the old country adapted to the styles and materials of the new land." Cyril Edel Leonoff, The Architecture of Jewish Settlements in the Prairie (Ottawa: Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, 1975), p. 1.
- 10 Cecil Roth, ed., Jewish Art: An Illustrated History (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), p. 765.
- 11 Rachel Wischnitzer, The Architecture of the European Synagogue (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of North America, 1964), pp. 145-6.

- 12 Ibid., p. 214.
- 13 Ibid., p. 196.
- 14 For biographies of John Wright, see Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, Victoria: A Primer for Regional History of Architecture (Watkins Glen: Pilgrim Guide to Historic Architecture, 1979), p. 351. (hereafter cited Victoria)....; and Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects Deceased (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970), pp. 673-4. Segger and Franklin's biography covers Wright's Victoria career well, and their dates for Wright's comings and goings in and out of Victoria tally with dates in the British Colonist. Dates in the Withey book seem less accurate, and it does not mention Wright's Victoria career; however it does list his California buildings.
- 15 Daily Colonist (Victoria), 9 June 1860.
- 16 British Colonist (Victoria), 14 Oct. 1865.
- 17 Victoria, p. 39.

1461 BLANSHARD STREET, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA



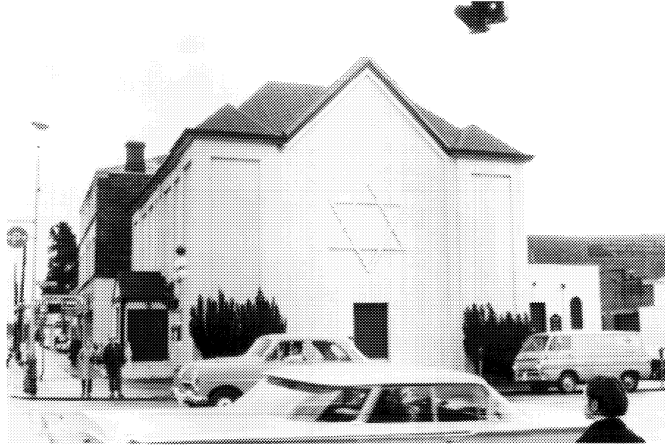
- 1 Congregation Emanuel Temple as it was originally, 1461 Blanshard Street, Victoria, British Columbia, built 1863; John Wright, architect. (Public Archives of British Columbia.)



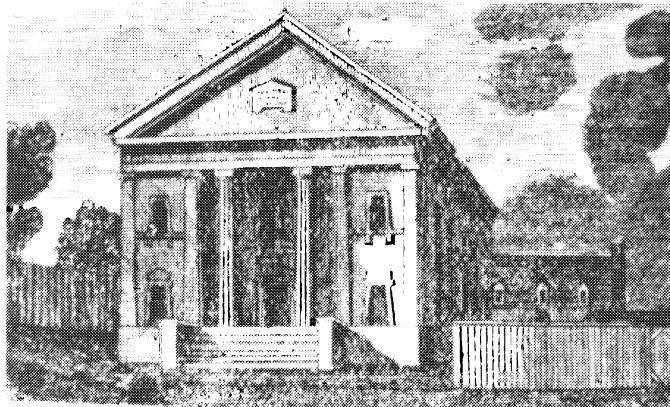
- 2 Interior of Congregation Emanuel Temple. (Public Archives of British Columbia.)

Temple Emanu-El (עמנואל): History Summary

1461 BLANSHARD STREET, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

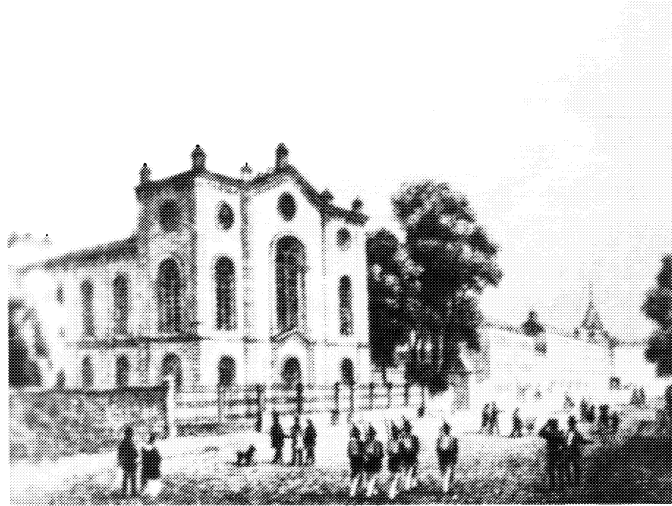


3 Congregation Emanuel Temple today. (CIHB.)

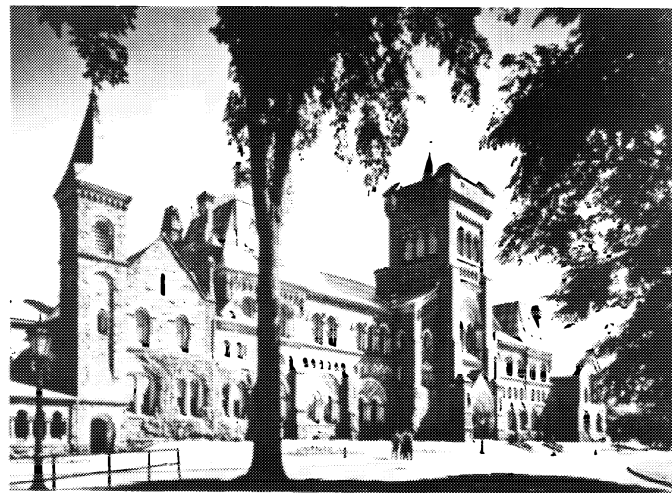


4 Shearith Israel Congregation Temple, Montreal, Quebec, built circa 1838. (Newton Bosworth, Hochelaga Depicta [Montreal: William Greig, 1839], opposite p. 11.)

1461 BLANSHARD STREET, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

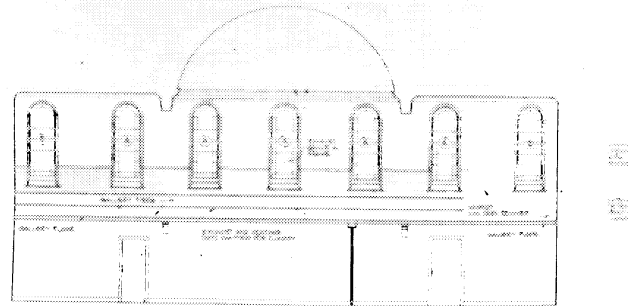


- 5 Synagogue, Kassel, Germany, built 1839; A. Schuchardt, architect. (Rachel Wischnitzer, The Architecture of the European Synagogue [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of North America, 1964], p. 197.)



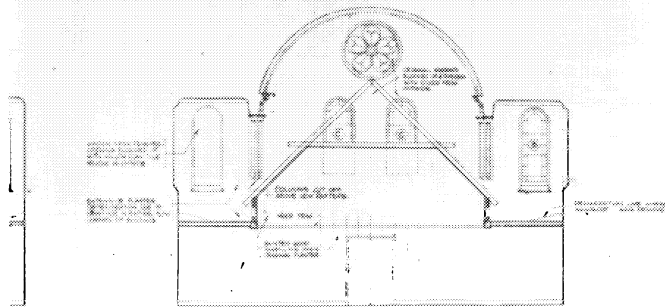
- 6 University College, Toronto, Ontario, built 1856; W. Cumberland, architect. (Eric Arthur, Toronto No Mean City [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974], p. 136.)

1461 BLANSHARD STREET, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA



3 LONGITUDINAL SECTION-ELEVATION

- 7 Longitudinal Section of Congregation Emanuel Temple showing dome. (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Recreation and Conservation.)



4 LATERAL SECTION-ELEVATION

- 8 Section showing false ceiling, Congregation Emanuel Temple. (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Recreation and Conservation.)

1461 BLANSHARD STREET, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA



- 9 Fairfield House, Trutch Street, Victoria, British Columbia, built 1871; John Wright, architect. (PAC C-3854.)
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- 10 Angela College, 923 Brudet Avenue, Victoria, British Columbia, built 1865; John Wright, architect. (CIHB.)