

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received JUL 17 1984

date entered AUG 16 1984

1. Name

historic Old Bnai Zion Synagogue

and/or common Sunset Palace

2. Location

street & number 906 North El Paso Street

N/A not for publication

city, town El Paso N/A vicinity of

state Texas code 048 county El Paso code 141

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Marcus Brothers Design and Construction Company

street & number 3434 Durazno

city, town El Paso N/A vicinity of state Texas 79905

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. El Paso Courthouse

street & number

city, town El Paso state Texas

6. Representation in Existing Surveystitle 1) El Paso Historical Register
2) Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate 1) August 1981 2) June 1984 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records 1) El Paso Historical Society, 2) Texas Historical Commission

city, town 1) El Paso 2) Austin state Texas

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Old Bnai Zion Synagogue, now called the Sunset Palace, is an unusual, early-20th-century structure that exhibits a hybrid Greek Revival/ Gothic Revival influence. The stylistic mixture would not have been unusual a century earlier, but it has few if any parallels in Texas at that period. The red-brick structure has been only slightly altered since its completion in 1912. Minor rear additions are unobtrusive and do not affect the integrity of the building.

The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue is a rectangular, masonry structure with a shallow roof. The entrance (northwest) is dominated by a raised portico with four partially fluted Tuscan-Doric columns supporting a simple entablature and shingled pediment. The centered double doors have two panels, the upper in an ogee arch configuration. The doors and one-over-one windows on each side are surmounted by Gothic transoms with wooden tracery. Brickwork is in a common-bond pattern, and was used to produce quoins and round-headed stacks.

The southeast and northwest elevations are mirror-images of each other. Both contain five one-over-one windows with pointed-arch transoms, with four smaller basement windows beneath. The walls are divided into three principal sections by pilaster-like projections, and are surmounted by a parapet extending around the structures. The rear (southeast) wall has two-over-two windows and a modern door at basement levels, as well as two one-over-one windows with pointed-arch transoms above. A canted, hip-roof projection above the basement door now connects to a new hipped rear porch, built from bricks taken from the ruins of the mikvah (ritual bath), which was originally located toward the rear of the property and burnt in 1980.

The synagogue consists basically of a large single room on the main floor and a modern apartment at the basement level. A flight of wooden stairs to the left (northeast) leads to the balcony, which had been the women's loft; to the right (southwest), wooden steps lead to a full basement that has been converted into a modern apartment. Under the balcony, on either side of the entrance into the main hall, men's and women's toilets have been added. Along the southeast wall, where the rabbi's platform stood, a low stage with a half-circle apron has been built. The Torah was formerly located in a center alcove. The eighteen-foot ceiling is covered in pressed tin and painted flat white. Three wooden-bladed fans have been incorporated into the ceiling light fixtures. The fixtures along the side walls and those in the stage area are original, except for replaced globes. The original yellow-pine flooring has been sanded and polished highly. Alterations have been made to maintain the integrity of the original design.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1912 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The old Bnai Zion Synagogue, home of El Paso's first Jewish community from 1912 to 1917, has played a significant part in the cultural and religious development of this city. From 1927 to 1934 (and beyond,) St. Nicholas Greek Church occupied the building. The red-brick structure was designed in an unusual, eclectic, classic style and it is perhaps the earliest synagogue extant in Trans-Pecos Texas. In more recent history, the old synagogue has continued to function as a sometimes social center, church, and (currently) as the Sunset Palace— a dance studio.

In 1900, the Orthodox Jewish Congregation Bnai Zion was granted its charter. On August 29, 1910, the group voted to purchase a lot on which to build a synagogue. Sometime between October 1 and December 31, 1912, the synagogue opened, according to Hymer E. Rosen, a life trustee and historian of Congregation Bnai Zion. The design chosen by the congregation is an unusual hybrid Greek Revival/Gothic Revival design common on the Eastern Seaboard in the first half of the 19th century, but totally unexpected in an early 20th century synagogue in far West Texas. The handsome portico features a shingled pediment, adding further stylistic eclecticism. In scale plan, use and date, the synagogue is similar to Temple Freda (National Register, 1983) in Bryan, Brazos County.

In 1927, the group, which had changed from Orthodox to Conservative Judaism, sold their first synagogue and moved to a new location at the corner of Cliff and Mesa streets. For the ensuing twenty-five years, the building was home to the Greek Orthodox Community. El Paso's first Eastern Orthodox church, St. Nicholas, held services at that site until the early 1950s, when, according to Father John Elias of St. George Orthodox Church, the St. Nicholas group joined his congregation. In 1962, the building was sold to H. J. Pandelides. "Lefty" Pandelides, a locally famous boxer, converted it into a boxing gym for a while. The family rented the structure to a variety of groups, the last being Faith Tabernacle. In 1978 the building was offered for sale, and in 1981 it was purchased by Marcus Investments and converted by Marcus Brothers Design and Construction Company. The structure has recently been sympathetically adapted as a dance studio and cultural center.

The synagogue is located at the western edge of Sunset Heights, one of the leading early-20th-century residential neighborhoods in El Paso. Located between the Rio Grande River and the Franklin Mountains, the area features fine, older homes, many of which have been rehabilitated. Unfortunately, Bnai Zion is threatened with the expansion of nearby El Paso Community College, whose parking lots now surround the historic synagogue.

9. Major Bibliographical References

El Paso County Historical Society. El Paso, a Centennial Portrait. El Paso, Texas, 1973.
Four Centuries 81 Foundation. Four Centuries at the Pass. El Paso, Texas, 1981.
Oral interviews by Dena Hirsch with Leon Metz, 6/75 and 7/77; Hymer Rosen, 9/81; Father
John Elias, 9/81; Hal Marcus, 4/83.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name El Paso

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UTM References

A

1	3
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3	5	18	9	15	10
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3	15	1	14	6	15	10
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B

1	3
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3	5	18	2	10	10
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3	15	1	15	1	10	10
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C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 47 and 48, Block 2 of the Satterthwaite Addition to the City of El Paso.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gene Keller - Researcher (with Peter Flagg Maxson, THC)

organization N/A date February 14, 1984

street & number 1006 North Oregon, #2 telephone (915) 544-9931

city or town El Paso state Texas 79902

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Curtis J. Purnell

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 6 July 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

**Entered in the
National Register**

date 8-16-84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
El Paso County
TEXAS

Working No. JUL 17 1984

Fed. Reg. Date: 8/5/85

Date Due: 8/16/84 - 8/31/84

Action: ☒ ACCEPT 8-16-84

Entered in the National Register ☐ RETURN

☐ REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

- ☐ resubmission
☐ nomination by person or local government
☐ owner objection
☐ appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____

Reviewer _____

Discipline _____

Date _____

_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category

Ownership

Public Acquisition

Status

Accessible

Present Use

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent

☐ good

☐ fair

☐ deteriorated

☐ ruins

☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered

☐ altered

Check one

☐ original site

☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- ☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ alterations/integrity
☐ dates
☐ boundary selection

8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☐ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date

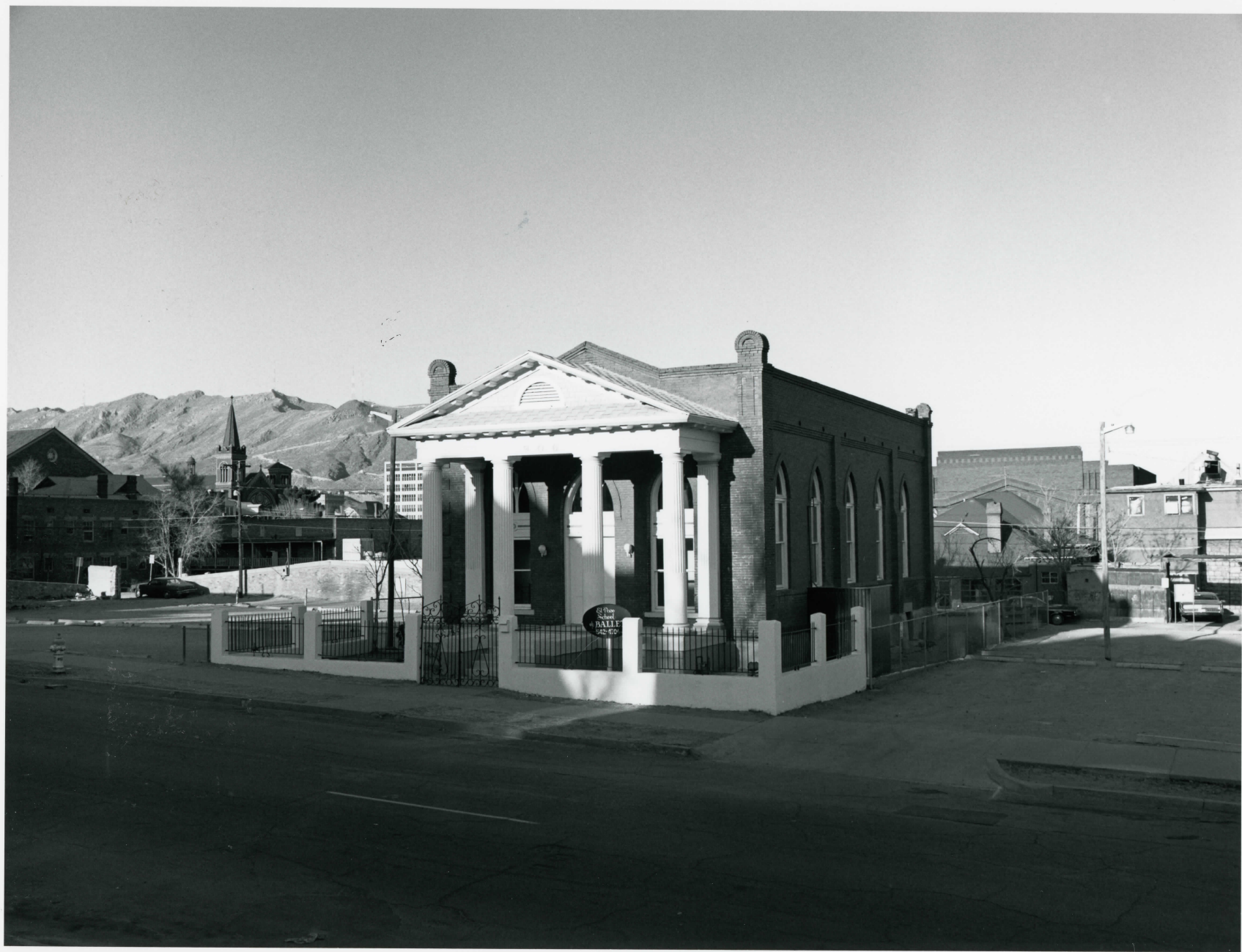
13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



196

The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
Southwest oblique; camera facing northeast
Photo 1 of 7



2876

The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
Northwest Oblique; camera facing southeast
Photo 2 of 7



The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
North; camera facing south
Photo 3 of 7

#396



#4 of 6

The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984,
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
East; camera facing west
Photo 4 of 7



4596

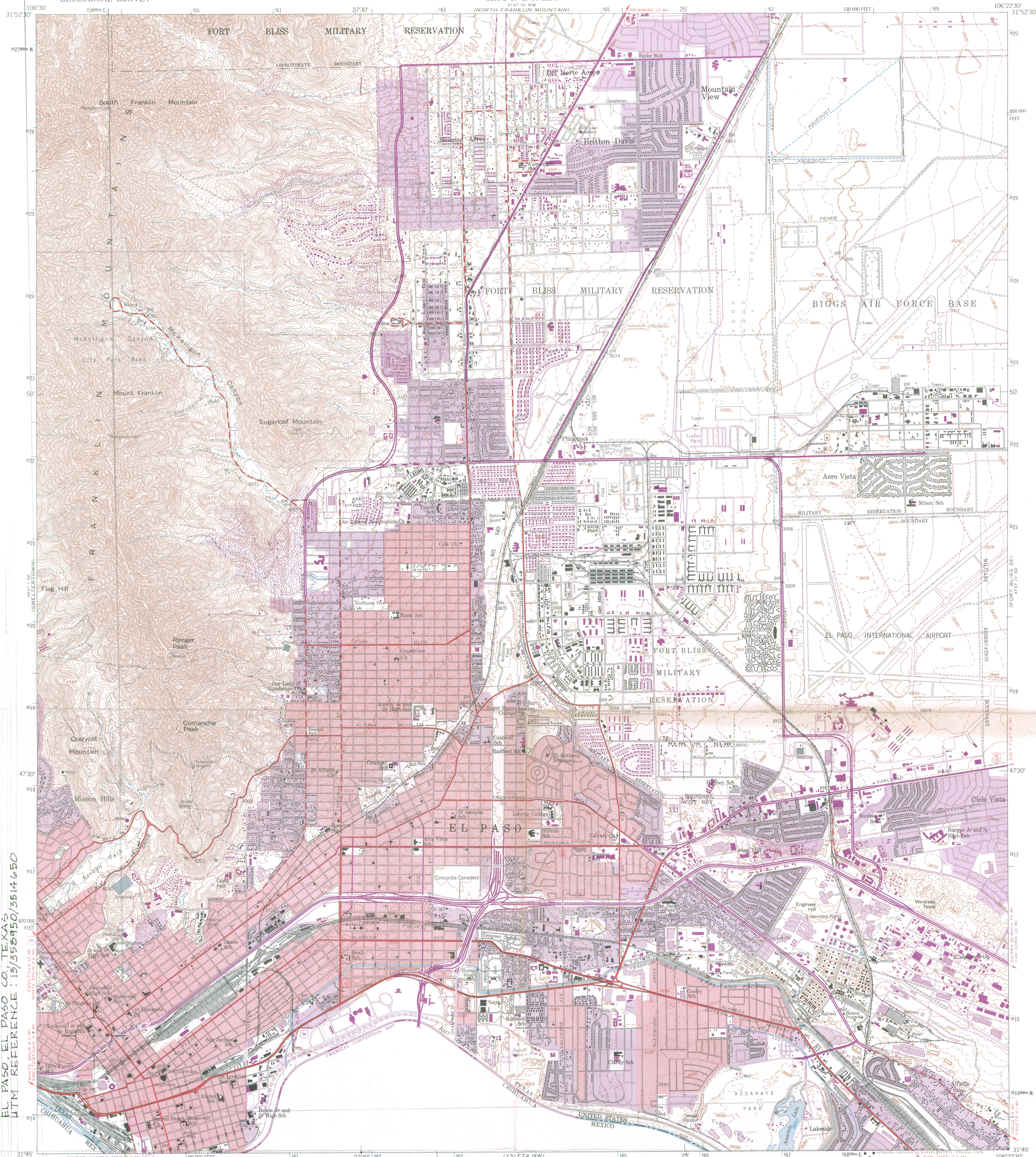
The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
Interior west; camera facing east
Photo 5 of 7



The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer, Maurice Heller; February 5, 1984;
Negatives with photographer
2734 Silver, El Paso, Texas 79930
Interior east; camera facing west
Photo 6 of 7



The Old Bnai Zion Synagogue
906 N. El Paso St., El Paso, El Paso Co., Texas
Photographer unknown, 1983. Neg. on file Marcus
Brothers Construction Co.
West elevation; camera facing east
Photo 7 of 7



Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods
Aerial photographs taken 1954. Photography field annotated 1955

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

Revisions shown in purple compiled by the Geological Survey from aerial photographs taken 1967 and 1973. This information not field checked

Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

UTM GRID AND 1973 MAGNETIC NORTH

SCALE 1:24 000

1 MIL

0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET

1 5 0 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET


DASHED LINES REPRESENT 10 FOOT CONTOURS

NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty.....  Light-duty..... 
Medium-duty..... Unimproved dirt =====

 Interstate Route  U.S. Route  State Route

EL PASO, TEX.
N3145-W10622.5/7.5

1955
PHOTOREVISED 1967 AND 1973
AMS 4747 IV SW-SERIES V882

3106-432

TEXAS

QUADRANGLE LOCATION