



## NHL Executive Summary



<b>Name of Property:</b>	Temple Aaron
<b>City, State:</b>	Trinidad, Colorado
<b>Period of Significance:</b>	1889, 1889–1972
<b>NHL Criteria:</b>	1, 4, Criteria Exception 1
<b>NHL Theme:</b>	I. Peopling Places 3. Migration from outside and within 4. Community and neighborhood II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements 3. Religious Institutions III. Expressing Cultural Values 5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

**Previous Recognition:** National Register of Historic Places, 1973

**National Historic Context:** n/a

### NHL Significance:

- Temple Aaron is nationally significant for its association with the westward migration of Jewish families and individuals from Europe between 1840-1924, representative of broad patterns of immigration and settlement in the United States during critical decades in the nation's growth and industrial development. More than 130 years after the synagogue's construction in 1889 and more than 135 years after its first *minyan* gathered, this small congregation—because of its dedicated stewardship of Temple Aaron—sustains the story of the Jewish people in the American West into the twenty-first century.
- Temple Aaron's founders played important leadership roles in the civic and social life of the community



and in its economic growth, in addition to its spiritual or religious life. Samuel Jaffa was elected as the first mayor of Trinidad in 1876. Solomon Jaffa served as city alderman. Together, the Jaffa brothers constructed the opera house, one of Trinidad's preeminent contemporary civic spaces and cultural institutions. The Jaffas and other temple founders also held leadership roles in a variety of fraternal organizations.

- Temple Aaron is nationally significant as an excellent example of synagogue architecture constructed by renowned architectural firm Bulger & Rapp in the exotic Moorish Revival style employed by Reform Jewish congregations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With its onion dome-topped tower and small minarets, Temple Aaron announced its difference, boldly distinguishing itself in the booming market town—signaling local tolerance of its distinctiveness as well as the foundational contributions of the Jewish community to Trinidad's settlement—while simultaneously connecting its Jewish congregants to a powerful history with ancient roots.

#### **Integrity:**

- Temple Aaron is the second-oldest known synagogue in continuous use in its original location west of the Mississippi River.
- Temple Aaron retains excellent interior and exterior physical integrity, as can be compared to an 1892 etching of the newly completed building and early historic photographs.
- The synagogue's exterior retains historic finishes, including character-defining features such as original geometric-patterned stained glass windows, sheet-metal roof, minarets, and onion dome.
- Temple Aaron's second-floor sanctuary retains signature furnishings and features, including wood pews, rabbi and cantor chambers, the *bimah* and its *ark*, *paroket*, and *ner talmid*, Estey pipe organ, and carved ceiling trusses and beams.
- Minor alterations include wall paneling on the first and second floors and a three-quarters-height partition wall in one of the two classrooms to create a small kitchen. All alterations date to the period of significance.

**Owner of Property:** Temple Aaron of Colorado

**Acres of Property:** Less than one

**Origins of Nomination:** The nomination was funded in a collaboration between the National Park Service Heritage Partnerships Program and Colorado Preservation, Inc.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** This nomination recognizes an underrepresented aspect of Jewish settlement in the intermountain West. Designation will raise further awareness for the continued preservation of this building and efforts by the congregation to interpret and sustain continued use of the site, listed in 2017 as one of Colorado's Most Endangered Places.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 21, 2023):**

- David Blancher, President, Jewish Federation of New Mexico
- Patrick Eidman, Chief Preservation Officer, History Colorado (SHPO)



- Linda A. Goff, President, New Mexico Jewish Historical Society
- Kim Grant, Director, Colorado's Most Endangered Places, Colorado Preservation, Inc.
- Emily Kahn, Program Coordinator, National Fund for Sacred Places, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Rob Nieweg, Vice President, Preservation Services and Outreach, National Trust for Historic Preservation

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

- Strengthen the comparable properties section by adding information about Jewish immigration in the West particularly in California, Oregon, and Washington. Also add the Temple in Butte, Montana which is within the Butte-Anaconda Historic District NHL.

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Temple Aaron in Trinidad, Colorado, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:** The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Temple Aaron in Trinidad, Colorado, as a National Historic Landmark.