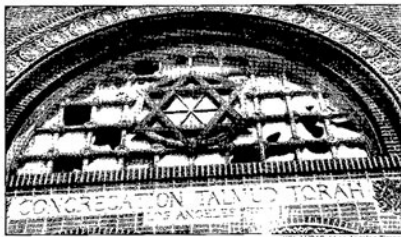


LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIALS

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Rebuilding the Temple



About \$5 million will breathe new life into Breed Street Shul.

Today it's hard to believe that the Breed Street Shul was once home to the largest Orthodox Jewish congregation in Los Angeles. Rain and graffiti taggers have damaged the frescoes in the Boyle Heights temple's brick sanctuary. Pigeons have made their home amid pews engraved with the Star of David, and a forbidding chain link fence now keeps out the drug dealers and gang bangers who in recent years had operated out of a smaller frame building on the property.

The Byzantine-revival shul, or synagogue, opened in 1923, quickly becoming a spiritual center for the 75,000 to 90,000 Jews—the highest concentration west of Chicago—who made Boyle Heights their home. The "Queen of Shuls," as Breed Street was known, was just one of many cultural institutions and businesses established by the largely immigrant Jewish community.

Following World War II, that community largely dispersed to the San Fernando Valley and the Westside, and Boyle Heights became home to a new generation of immigrants, this time from Mexico and Latin America. Brooklyn Avenue, which is Sunset Boulevard west of Figueroa Street, became Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard, and the Breed Street congregation, already aged and dwindling in number, closed

the synagogue's doors in 1996.

With help from Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, they could open again. The Los Angeles Democrat has a welcome appreciation for the city's architectural past, having already acquired state funds to renovate St. Vibiana's Cathedral and retool some of the graceful old commercial buildings downtown. He is now helping Jewish and Latino groups that are working together to breathe new life into the historic shul. Cedillo's bill, AB 368, would provide \$1 million of an estimated \$5 million needed to renovate the buildings and reopen them to serve Boyle Heights' new residents while honoring its old ones. Possible uses include a museum, a cultural center or a performing arts venue.

The project has a ways to go: Cedillo's bill could come before the Assembly Appropriations Committee in the coming week. Local residents and the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California are just starting the process of deciding how best to use the building. Supporters will have to raise the millions needed to cover the daunting renovation task. Even so, the shul's historical and architectural worth are significant, and the project has already generated broad-based enthusiasm that deserves the Legislature's support.