

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Founder's Church of Religious Science

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)



## 2. Location

Street & number: 3281 West Sixth Street

City or town: Los Angeles State: California County: Los Angeles

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A \_\_\_B \_\_\_C \_\_\_D

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____	

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<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site

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Structure

Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Mid-Century Modern

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: Concrete  
Walls: Concrete, Glass  
Roof: Asphalt

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Founder's Church of Religious Science was constructed in 1959. This two-story-over-basement, Mid-Century Modern style religious building is located along a densely developed commercial corridor in central Los Angeles. It is constructed of steel and reinforced concrete and is capped by a large, domed roof with accompanying flat and pent volumes. Other distinguishing characteristics of the building include its elliptical plan and a 14-foot-tall perimeter wall composed of perforated concrete breezeblocks. Set behind the breezeblock wall is a small garden and the building's main entrance, which is oriented to the south. Additional entrances are located on secondary elevations. The south-facing wall (adjacent to the main entrance) is extensively glazed with fixed, floor-to-ceiling metal windows; elsewhere on the building, fenestration is minimal and generally consists of steel casement windows. Ornament is limited to breezeblock details and signage. Interior spaces include a quadruple-height sanctuary; chapel; glazed lobby; multi-purpose room; and auxiliary spaces including offices, restrooms, and a kitchen. Since few substantive alterations have been made to the building, it retains all aspects of historic integrity.

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## Narrative Description

### *Exterior*

Located at the northeast corner of Sixth and Berendo streets in the Wilshire Center/Koreatown neighborhood of central Los Angeles, the Founder's Church of Religious Science is a two-story-over-basement religious building constructed in 1959. The building is slightly set back and has frontage on both Sixth and Berendo streets. It is constructed of steel and reinforced concrete, sits on a concrete foundation, and is elliptical in plan. Architecturally it embodies the structural expression, geometric simplicity, and freedom of form associated with Mid-Century Modernism.

Most of the building is capped by a large, reinforced concrete dome that accentuates the building's rounded form. The dome spans 110 feet at its longest dimension, and rises to a height equivalent to four stories above the sanctuary floor. It is supported by a steel membrane comprising 32 angle-truss members. Elsewhere on the building, the roof is composed of flat and pent volumes with parapets. Exterior walls consist of unadorned, painted cast concrete panels.

The building reads as symmetrical and balanced when viewed from the street. Its primary elevation faces south, toward Sixth Street. Most features on this elevation are obscured by a 14-foot-tall accent wall composed of concrete breezeblocks. The blocks are set within a steel structural frame and are perforated with stylized crosses. This wall is punctuated by three portals that function as points of ingress; the portals were originally open to the street, but have since been enclosed with metal security gates (date of installation unknown).<sup>1</sup> Due to slight grade changes, two of the portals are elevated and are accessed by concrete steps with metal handrails.

The main entrances to the building are located on the primary elevation, to the rear (north) of the accent wall, and consist of three pairs of glazed metal doors with wood-and-metal pulls. Each entrance is capped by a concrete canopy that projects out to the accent wall, and is accessed by concrete steps with metal handrails. The glazed doors are incorporated into a continuous band of fixed, floor-to-ceiling metal windows that spans the length of the south wall. Wall-mounted metal letters spelling "CHURCH OF RELIGIOUS SCIENCE" are affixed to the top of this wall.

The west elevation, which faces Berendo Street, is also oriented toward the street. It is three bays wide: a full-height center bay is flanked by another full-height bay (to the south) and a partial-height bay (to the north). At the center of this elevation is another entrance, which consists of two pairs of glazed doors with transoms, sidelights, and wood-and-metal pulls. The threshold between the entrance and the lot line is finished in terrazzo. The entrance is surmounted by a broad, cantilevered concrete canopy. Affixed to the canopy are wall-mounted metal letters spelling "HOLMES MEMORIAL CHAPEL." Above the canopy are three tall, narrow vertical channels that are clad with the same perforated concrete breezeblocks that are applied to the accent wall (on the south elevation). The partial-height bay (at the north end of the elevation)

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<sup>1</sup> Gleaned from comparison of historical and current photographs of the building. The installation of these metal gates is not reflected in the permit record for the property.

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features paired steel casement windows, some of which are obscured by non-original metal security bars (date of installation unknown). The rest of this elevation is devoid of fenestration.

The east elevation is similar in composition to the west elevation. It, too, features a central entrance composed of glazed doors, transoms, sidelights, and wood-and-metal pulls. The entrance is surmounted by a broad, cantilevered concrete canopy, which in turn is surmounted by two tall, narrow vertical channels with inset breezeblocks. Fenestration on this elevation consists of paired steel casement windows and a large, fixed metal picture window at ground level.

The north elevation abuts the north lot line and is largely obscured from view. It is minimally articulated, and features unadorned concrete walls and secondary metal entrance doors.

There are several original landscape and hardscape features on the property. A narrow garden and forecourt occupies the intermediate space between the breezeblock accent wall and the main entrances on the primary elevation. A second, private garden is located adjacent to the northwest corner of the building, and is accessed via the minister's office (on the ground story). It is enclosed by a concrete masonry unit (CMU) wall. The south and west lot lines are delineated by painted CMU perimeter walls, which have been augmented with non-original metal rails (date of installation unknown). Near the southwest corner of the site are integral concrete planters and a concrete stair wall. The stair wall features metal letters spelling "FOUNDERS CHURCH RELIGIOUS SCIENCE," and is capped by a non-original geometric metal rail (added ca. 2010).

The east entrance is approached by a non-original paved forecourt, which creates a buffer between the subject building and an adjacent office building to the east. The forecourt is accentuated by small planters and concrete retaining walls. The planters feature carrotwood trees and manicured box hedges. The forecourt appears to have been added in the late 1980s, when the adjacent parcel at 3251 West Sixth Street was redeveloped with the present-day office building.

Other non-original hardscape features include a metal flagpole at the southwest corner of the property (installed 1974), and a freestanding sign structure in the south setback (installed 1976).

### ***Interior***

Interior spaces are divided between two main stories and a basement. The basement sits slightly below street level and is accessed from the west (Berendo Street). Principal spaces on this level include a chapel, a multi-purpose room, and a kitchen. It also contains offices, storage rooms, and other auxiliary spaces. The ground story, which sits slightly above street level and is accessed from the south (Sixth Street), is primarily occupied by a lobby and the main sanctuary. Other spaces on this level include a crying room, offices, and other auxiliary spaces. The partial second story is occupied by the sanctuary balcony and a small projection box.

The primary (south) entrance opens into a corridor that functions as the main lobby. The lobby is a linear space with a curved plan that conforms to the contour of the building. Its south wall is dominated by a continuous band of glazing comprising fixed, floor-to-ceiling metal windows and

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glazed doors. The space has acoustic ceilings, carpeted floors, and wallpapered walls. Carpeted interior stairs with wood-and-metal handrails provide access to the basement and balcony levels.

Multiple sets of wood doors provide lead from the lobby into the sanctuary. The sanctuary is the unequivocal focal point of the building's interior. It is a voluminous, quadruple-height space that seats nearly 1,500 parishioners on two levels and is capped by a domed ceiling with can lights. Floors are raked, and are finished in carpet (at the aisles) and asbestos tiles (in the seating area); walls are finished in a combination of plaster, acoustical panels, and pegboard. Most of the space is occupied by rows of upholstered folding seats (rather than conventional church pews), which give the church a theatrical quality. The chancel, located at the north end of the room, is elevated and is accessed by carpeted steps. It features a wood pulpit, wood choir rail, and rows of upholstered folding seats. On the wall behind the chancel is a mural ("Wisdom of the Ages," by artist and set designer Wallace Roland Stark) that features various symbols that are relevant to the congregation and its liturgical beliefs. The mural was applied with a luminous paint that glows when exposed to ultraviolet light, making it appear as if it is a true stained glass window.

The sanctuary features a partial second story, which projects out over the room to create an undulated balcony. The balcony level features multiple rows of upholstered folding seats bisected by aisles. At the center of the balcony is a projection box; the box is surmounted by a *Trompette en Chamade*, or horizontally mounted reed stops that service the church's pipe organ.

On the west wall of the sanctuary are one-way mirrors that service an adjacent crying room. Accessed from the lobby, the crying room provides space for parents of young children to observe church services without disturbing others. It is a small space with acoustic ceilings and carpeted floors. Appended to the crying room is a small restroom, which was modified for purposes of handicapped access (date of modification unknown).

The west entrance (facing Berendo Street) opens into a small auxiliary lobby that is sunken slightly below street level, in the basement. Immediately upon entering, there is a set of stairs flanked on either side by access ramps and integral planters. The stairs, ramps, and planters are finished in terrazzo. At the base of the stairs is a set of wood doors that leads into a chapel (Holmes Memorial Chapel). The chapel is smaller than the main sanctuary and seats 420. It is capped by a low ceiling, and features a combination of carpet (aisles) and asbestos tile (seating area) floors. The chancel is elevated. Several stained glass panels are located on the east wall, and are backlit as to emulate the appearance of stained glass windows. The chapel is occupied by multiple rows of upholstered folding seats that are set within conventional wood pew frames.

To the east of the chapel, also on the basement level, is a multi-purpose room that houses the institution's small on-site museum and is also used as a venue for church events. It is an open-plan space with low asbestos tile ceilings, carpeted floors, and plaster and wood paneled walls. Part of the room has been cordoned off with a non-original wood-and-glass partition wall (installed ca. 2000), creating a space that is used as a bookstore. A kitchen adjoins the multi-purpose room.

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Other interior spaces are occupied by circulation corridors, offices, storage facilities, restrooms, and other auxiliary uses. These secondary interior spaces are generally unarticulated and feature acoustic ceilings, carpeted floors, and plaster walls. The minister's office, which is located at the northwest corner of the building on the ground story, features wood paneled walls and a sliding aluminum door that leads to a private garden. Interior doors are wood; those leading to publically accessible interior spaces generally have decorative wood-and-metal pulls.

### Alterations

The following alterations are reflected in the building permit record for the property, accessed online via the City of Los Angeles's Department of Building and Safety:

- 1974: Addition of 65-foot flagpole (at southwest corner of building)
- 1976: Addition of freestanding sign (east side of primary elevation)
- 1985: Dome and entrance canopies re-roofed
- 1993: Existing sections of rock roof replaced with built-up roof
- 1998: Repair of damage to exterior wall caused by motor vehicle (location unknown)

Additional alterations were noted during a March 2019 site visit.<sup>2</sup> Generally, these alterations are minor in scope and do not affect the appearance of the building in a substantive way.

- Addition of metal security gates to the breezeblock accent wall (primary elevation)
- Addition of metal security bars to some windows (all elevations)
- Addition of metal rails to perimeter walls and stair wall (primary, west elevations)
- Addition of a paved forecourt to the east of the building
- Modification of the crying room restroom for handicapped access (ground story)
- Reconfiguration of the multi-purpose room to accommodate a bookstore (basement)

### Evaluation of Integrity

The Founder's Church of Religious Science retains a high degree of integrity. Very few alterations have taken place since the building was constructed, and those that have occurred are nominal and primarily involve the addition of security features. The most visible alterations – the addition of security doors, security window bars, and metal railings atop the perimeter walls and stair wall – have not resulted in significant changes in the appearance of the building. Other alterations, such as the reconfiguration of some secondary interior spaces, are relatively minor in scope. Almost all of the building's original architectural features and materials remain intact and in situ, and overall the building continues to express its original design intent and exudes a strong sense of time and place. It therefore retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It also retains integrity of location, since it has not been moved, and integrity of setting, since its environs have not significantly changed since its construction in 1959.

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the east forecourt, which was added in the late 1980s, and the partition wall in the multi-purpose room, which was installed ca. 2000, the date of these additional alterations is not known.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1959-1964  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1959 (original construction)  
1964 (construction of basement-level chapel)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Williams, Paul R. (architect)  
Carter, George W. (builder)  
Stark, Wallace Roland (artist)

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Founder's Church of Religious Science is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of Mid-Century Modern ecclesiastical architecture, and was designed by renowned Los Angeles architect Paul R. Williams. The period of significance begins in 1959, when the building exterior and most interior spaces were constructed, and ends in 1964, when the chapel and other notable interior spaces were complete and the final Certificate of Occupancy was issued.

Since the significance of the property is derived expressly from its architecture, it satisfies the conditions enumerated in Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

***Mid-Century Modern Architecture***

The Founder's Church of Religious Science is designed in the Mid-Century Modern style. "Mid-Century Modern" is a broad term that is used to describe the various derivatives of Modern architecture that flourished in the post-World War II period. These include post-war adaptations of the International Style, post-and-beam construction, and more organic and expressive interpretations of the Modern architectural movement. Mid-Century Modernism was popular between the mid-1940s and early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> It proved to be a remarkably adaptable and versatile idiom that was expressed through an array of property types ranging from single residences, to large-house housing tracts, to commercial buildings, and to institutional properties and industrial campuses. Its aesthetic was incorporated into both high-style buildings and the local vernacular, and was employed by architects and developer-builders alike.

Mid-Century Modernism is rooted in various experiments in Modern architecture that were introduced in the early twentieth century. The International Style, which came out of Europe in the 1920s, introduced a cogent approach to design that was characterized by simple geometric forms, smooth wall surfaces, the honest expression of structure and materials, and the absence of superfluous ornament.<sup>4</sup> At about the same time, a small group of maverick American architects including Frank Lloyd Wright and Irving Gill were also dabbling in experimental new forms, methods, and materials in their quest to develop an indigenous style of American architecture.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> SurveyLA, Citywide Historic Context Statement Summary Tables, "Architecture and Engineering, 1850-1980."

<sup>4</sup> Natalie W. Shivers, "Architecture: A New Creative Medium," in *LA's Early Moderns: Art/Architecture/Photography* (Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 2003), 132.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

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Mid-Century Modernism draws upon these earlier paradigms, and is emblematic of how the principles of Modernism were adapted to the conditions of post-World War II life. Over time, architects took the basic tenets of the International Style and similar experiments in domestic Modernism, augmented them, and developed dialects of Modernism that were both rational and sensitive to their respective physical and cultural contexts. In Southern California, this was manifest in an architectural vocabulary defined by a clear expression of structure and materials, wide expanses of plate glass, and open interior plans.<sup>6</sup> Some architects, enraptured by the movement's emphasis on freedom of form and structural innovation, also incorporated sweeping forms and expressionistic elements into Mid-Century Modern design, referencing the organic and sculptural tendencies of architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Lloyd Wright, and John Lautner.

Southern California was a locus of innovation with respect to the Mid-Century Modern movement. In large part, the region's association with the ascent of post-war Modernism was made famous through *Arts & Architecture* magazine's Case Study House Program, an internationally recognized showcase of residential design that was commissioned by the magazine's forward-reaching editor, John Entenza. Commencing in 1945 and continuing until 1966, the program publicized thirty-six dwellings that were designed by a number of prominent architects who would go on to become some of the region's foremost exponents of Modernism.<sup>7</sup> Entenza foresaw the extraordinary demand for new housing that affected American society after World War II, and intended for the program to show how modern materials and methods could be applied to create quality dwellings attainable to the nation's burgeoning middle class.<sup>8</sup>

Various derivatives of the Mid-Century Modern style emerged as the movement gained traction and became more mainstream. The style was adapted in a particularly expressive way to churches and other ecclesiastical buildings constructed in the postwar period. At this time, many congregations were swelling as the American economy flourished and its population witnessed remarkable growth. Church culture also evolved during this period; specifically, the church "grew beyond serving as just a space for worship into a place for community activities," and ecclesiastical buildings featured less iconography as social values – as opposed to faith – were emphasized.<sup>9</sup> This led architects and parishioners to reexamine ecclesiastical design. The large, single-room sanctuaries that had dominated for generations was increasingly becoming effete.

However, despite the need for expansion and modernization, many congregations were constricted by limited funds and simply could not afford to construct the large, embellished edifices that had historically typified ecclesiastical design. In contrast, Modernism lent itself especially well to the evolving needs of these religious institutions. Compared to the more traditional Gothic and Romanesque Revival styles, Modernism utilized materials that were generally more cost effective and readily available. Industrial materials such as concrete, steel

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<sup>6</sup> SurveyLA, Citywide Historic Context Statement Summary Tables, "Architecture and Engineering, 1850-1980."

<sup>7</sup> "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, The Case Study House Program: 1945-1966," prepared Dec. 2012, revised Mar. 2013.

<sup>8</sup> John Entenza, "Announcement: The Case Study House Program," *Arts and Architecture* (Jan. 1945), 37-39.

<sup>9</sup> "Mid-Century Modern Church Survey: Religious Structures 1940-1970 in St. Louis County," prepared by Esley Hamilton and Catie Myers, 2009-2010, 5.

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structural frames, and laminated beams were used in lieu of brick or stone, significantly reducing construction costs.<sup>10</sup> These materials also allowed architects to design expressive buildings that symbolized the eminent role that churches played in the social realm of society at this time.

Churches and ecclesiastical buildings designed in the Mid-Century Modern style tend to be exceptionally bold and expressive adaptations of post-war Modernism. Common characteristics include sculptural forms and geometric volumes; curved, sweeping wall surfaces; dramatic and/or unusual roof forms that enhance the building's sculptural qualities; exaggerated structural expression; and economical materials like concrete, steel, glass, stone veneer, and breezeblocks.

The Founder's Church of Religious Science is an excellent example of this ecclesiastical variant of Mid-Century Modern architecture. It embodies distinctive characteristics of the style including an unusual and distinctive elliptical plan, which maximizes the building's efficiency; a large domed roof structure that reinforces the building's sense of geometry and adds a degree of visual interest; unadorned concrete exterior walls; a continuous band of flush-mounted metal windows and doors; and the judicious application of economical architectural details including the perforated breezeblock accent wall. The building exhibits exceptional attention to detail and a level of articulation that renders it significant with respect to ecclesiastical Modern architecture.

### ***Paul R. Williams, FAIA***

The Founder's Church of Religious Science was designed by Paul R. Williams (1894-1980), an esteemed architect who mastered an array of architectural styles, broke down racial barriers in the white-dominated architectural profession, and left an indelible imprint on Southern California's built environment. With a career that spanned more than five decades and resulted in some 3,000 individual buildings, Williams was, without question, one of Southern California's most highly influential architects of the early to mid-twentieth century, and perhaps of all time.

Paul Revere Williams was born in 1894 in Los Angeles. Orphaned at the age of four, he was raised by a foster family. He excelled in school and studied architecture at Los Angeles's Polytechnic High School, where he graduated in 1912.<sup>11</sup> Though many of Williams's professors doubted that he would be able to make a career as an architect due to his African American heritage, the young designer nonetheless pursued his passion by attending classes at the Los Angeles School of Art and the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, and by producing monograms for women's purses and watch fobs.<sup>12</sup> His first known architecture job was with planner and landscape architect Wilbur D. Cook, Jr., where he contributed to the designs of a town called Planada, and the gardens of Irving J. Gill's Dodge House.<sup>13</sup> He also worked for Pasadena architect Reginald Johnson, where he became acquainted with the Spanish Colonial Revival and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson (1993), 11; David Gebhard, foreword to *Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Gebhard, foreword to *Paul R. Williams, Architect* (1993), 20.

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Mediterranean Revival styles.<sup>14</sup> Also at this time, Williams studied engineering at the University of Southern California (USC), though he did not receive a terminal degree.

Williams was able to expand his repertoire when he landed a job as Chief Draftsman in the office of prominent Los Angeles architect John C. Austin. When he worked with Austin between 1919 and 1921, he was introduced to a wider variety of projects including offices, hotels, multi-family residences, and public and civic buildings.<sup>15</sup> He became a licensed architect – and was notably the first licensed African American architect west of the Mississippi River – in 1921, a notable feat in an era when racism within the profession was blatant and rampant. With his architectural license in hand, Williams founded his own eponymous firm in Los Angeles in 1923.<sup>16</sup>

By this time, Williams had won several competitions and had earned myriad accolades for his high quality residential designs, which became the bread and butter of his practice. His early commissions generally included single-family houses in Southern California that reflected a slightly modern take on the Tudor Revival, French Norman, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean Revival styles that were popular at the time.<sup>17</sup> Many of these houses were located in Los Angeles's affluent neighborhoods including the Wilshire area and the Hollywood Hills, though his work could also be found in other Southern California communities.

Known for his astuteness and the exceptional quality of his work, Williams “masterfully navigated the business and social circles of the day.”<sup>18</sup> His penchant for designing houses that possessed graceful, elegant proportions also attracted those with money and status. He was quickly thrust into the upper echelons of Los Angeles's architectural scene and counted wealthy businessmen, celebrities, and socialites – almost all of whom were white and wealthy – amongst his clientele. Some of his clients were celebrities from the Golden Age of Hollywood including comedians Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, actors Lon Chaney and Barbara Stanwyck, crooner Frank Sinatra, comedian Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and others.<sup>19</sup>

By the 1930s, owning a Paul Williams house was considered to be a badge of prestige. Though he rarely deviated from Period Revival styles at this point in his career, the architect went to great lengths to customize details for each of his clients, ensuring that all of his buildings were unique. He also worked in an array of Period Revival idioms and demonstrated mastery and virtuosity in virtually all of them. Architectural historian David Gebhard describes Williams's keen ability to blend and manipulate styles in a manner that distinguished him from his peers:

Williams had an adroit ability to maneuver beaux-arts formalism within different architectural style and in projects both small and large. Although his residential design of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, “Paul R. Williams,” accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Gebhard, foreword to *Paul R. Williams, Architect* (1993), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, “Paul R. Williams,” accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>19</sup> The Paul R. Williams Project, “Paul R. Williams, Architect,” accessed Mar. 2019.

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the thirties were quite classical in their organization, the symmetry was always parried by non-formal elements, and his use of historical styles always had a modernist flavor.<sup>20</sup>

These qualities ensured that Williams remained successful amid the hardships imposed by the Great Depression, during which time his firm continued to thrive.<sup>21</sup> While residential commissions continued to be an important part of his firm's body of work, Williams diversified his repertoire to include commercial and institutional designs; notable examples include the Angelus Funeral Home (1934) in Los Angeles; and the Music Corporation of America (MCA) Building (1937), Saks Fifth Avenue (1939), and the remodel of the Beverly Hills Hotel (1940s), all in Beverly Hills. He played an influential role in designing some of the nation's first experiments in public housing including the Langston Terrace Dwellings in Washington, D.C. (1938) and Pueblo del Rio in Los Angeles (1943). By 1940 his firm's output was estimated to be 40 percent residential projects and 60 percent commercial and institutional work.<sup>22</sup>

As his career progressed, Williams continued to adapt his repertoire to account for shifts in architectural taste and the introduction of new methods and materials. After World War II he experimented with, and mastered multiple iterations of the Moderne and Modern styles that redefined the built environment of Southern California amid its period of tremendous postwar growth. In addition to the Founder's Church of Religious Science (1959) in the Wilshire Center/Koreatown neighborhood, notable designs of Williams from this period include the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Building (1949) and his contributions to the LAX's Theme Building (1961), La Concha Motel in Las Vegas (1961), and the Westwood Medical Center (1962). This ability to adapt to the changing conditions of architecture and embrace evolving tastes demonstrated Williams's remarkable skill and virtuosity, and also ensured that he remained not just relevant, but incredibly successful in a society mired in progress and change.

One of the most glaring ironies in Williams's career was the fact that many of the buildings he designed, and many of the most exquisite examples of his work, were located in communities that were bounded by racial covenants and expressly shut out minority groups. Thus, as an African American man Williams would not have been able to live in a considerable number of the houses within his portfolio. The majority of Williams's clients were white, and many were purportedly so uncomfortable sitting next to a man of color that he learned to draw upside down so that he could sit at a comfortable distance and assuage the concerns of his timid clients.<sup>23</sup>

The overtly racist environment within which Williams worked made his contributions to Southern California architecture all the more remarkable. Incisive, astute, and determined, he broke barrier upon barrier throughout course of his career. In 1920 he was appointed to serve on the first Los Angeles City Planning Commission; in 1923 he became the first African American member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA); and in 1957, he became the first African

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<sup>20</sup> Gebhard, foreword to *Paul R. Williams, Architect* (1993), 24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Hudson (1993), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, "Paul R. Williams," accessed Mar. 2019; Stephen Sennott, ed., *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Architecture Vol. 3* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), 1443.

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American member of the AIA to be inducted into the organization's College of Fellows.<sup>24</sup> In addition to building up and presiding over one of the most esteemed architectural firms in Southern California, Williams was a loyal civic leader. He served on multiple national and statewide commissions, campaigned for presidential candidate Nelson Rockefeller in the 1960s, and held the post of Los Angeles Municipal Art Commission president for eleven years.<sup>25</sup>

Williams retired in 1973, fifty years after founding his practice.<sup>26</sup> He died in 1980 at the age of 85. In 2017 he was posthumously awarded the AIA's Gold Metal, the institution's highest honor.

Constructed in 1959, the Founder's Church of Religious Science is considered to be a significant example of Williams's body of work after World War II. Its straightforward, yet distinctive design – underscored by its elliptical plan, domed roof, and perforated breezeblock accent wall – strikes a careful balance between the objectives of aesthetics and functionality. It is a clear expressions of how Williams – who was trained in, and built his practice around the Beaux Arts and Period Revival traditions – was able to adapt to emergent trends in architecture and demonstrate mastery in Modern vocabularies. The Founder's Church of Religious Science is also notable as one of few religious buildings that Williams designed. Of the thousands of buildings in his portfolio, only a handful were constructed for religious congregations.

### ***Development of the Founder's Church of Religious Science***

The building was constructed by, and has continuously served as a church facility for the Founder's Church of Religious Science.

The Church of Religious Science is a spiritual, philosophical, and metaphysical movement that originated in Los Angeles in the 1920s and has subsequently grown into an international organization. It was conceived by Dr. Ernest Holmes (1887-1960), who founded what is now called the Church of Religious Science based on a series of philosophical beliefs that he articulated in a 1926 book entitled *The Science of Mind*.<sup>27</sup> Holmes was strongly influenced by Emma Curtis Hopkins, a former student of Christian Science, and by the writings of authors Judge Thomas Troward and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Holmes's writings form the basis of Religious Science, which is a correlation of the teachings of science, philosophy, and religion.<sup>28</sup>

Originally not in favor of identifying as a "church" – the movement was envisioned as more of a teaching institution – Holmes founded the Institute of Religious Science and School of Philosophy in 1927, and began publishing a periodical entitled *Science of Mind*, which is still in publication with approximately 50,000 readers worldwide. Eventually, he re-incorporated the institution as a religious organization called the Church of Religious Science. Holmes spoke

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<sup>24</sup> The Paul R. Williams Project, "Paul R. Williams, Architect," accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, "Paul R. Williams," accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Founder's Church of Religious Science "History", accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Holmes, *The Original Science of Mind* (1926), free online edition accessed Mar. 2019.



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about the institution's core beliefs every Sunday morning at various local theaters and other temporary venues, since for years the institution lacked a permanent house of worship.

Over time, as the institution matured and its influence spread, Holmes and Dr. William H.D. Hornaday (1910-1992), who delivered a weekly Religious Science ministry, expressed interest in constructing a dedicated church building. In 1957, Holmes asked Paul R. Williams to submit a sketch for a new church at the corner of Sixth and Berendo streets. This site was located adjacent to the Church's administrative facilities. Williams proposed an elliptically shaped building, which Holmes embraced as the "perfect symbol for the wholeness, unity, unending and all-inclusive power of love basic to Science of Mind teachings".<sup>29</sup> Ground was broken in 1958, construction (aside from the basement level) was completed in 1959, and the building was dedicated in 1960.

Though Williams was asked specifically to provide the design and construction ideas for the church, he was not a member of the Church of Religious Science. He was, however, acquainted with Ernest Holmes, who had purchased a Williams-designed residence in the 1950s. When Holmes died, Williams referred to him as "a great spiritual leader and my valued friend".<sup>30</sup>

Williams designed the building to be a bold architectural statement. In contrast to the conservative, cruciform footprints that were typical of ecclesiastical architecture, this building was designed around an elliptical footprint that required considerable engineering prowess to execute. The *Los Angeles Times*, reporting on the building's construction in 1959, remarked that "construction of the curved wall and the main auditorium floor composed of compound curves and warped concrete required unique concrete forming procedures."<sup>31</sup> The building's unusual shape was accentuated by an enormous reinforced concrete dome atop the roof, which required over 30 tons of structural steel to construct. Facilities were included for closed-circuit television, which was still a new technology in the 1950s. The main sanctuary, with its auditorium-style seats and lack of overt religious references, more closely resembled a theater than it did a church.

Due in no small part to its innovative design, the building was prominently featured in various newspapers and periodicals over the course of its construction. The *Los Angeles Times* published a series of articles about the building's construction, focusing largely on the structural and engineering challenges associated with making Williams's elliptical design a reality. The building was also discussed in national publications including *Jet* magazine (March 1958) and *Newsweek* (January 1960). The latter included a detailed description of the building:

The brand-new Founder's Church of Religious Science, Berendo and Sixth streets, is a \$1,250,000 ellipse of gleaming reinforced concrete, glass, and structural steel. It is the expression of a faith which tries to distill the quintessence of the world's spiritual and intellectual riches. The building and its surrounding wall enclose a garden (to contain

<sup>29</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, "Paul R. Williams," accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Revere Williams Project, Founder's Church Gallery <http://www.paulwilliamsproject.org/gallery/1950s-churches/>

<sup>31</sup> "Many Difficulties Encountered on Job," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1959.

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statuary representing all the greatest religious figures, scientists, philosophers), and such luxuries as a theater-style auditorium fitted with 1,600 foam-rubber seats covered with iridescent green velvet, and a pastor's office with private garden.<sup>32</sup>

The church building was dedicated in January 1960.<sup>33</sup> Later that year, a mural was added to the north wall of the sanctuary by artist and set designer Wallace Roland Stark. Stark's mural, entitled "Wisdom of the Ages," depicts more than 100 symbols "representing the spiritual, artistic and scientific achievement of humanity" and reflects Holmes's fascination with symbolism.<sup>34</sup> Stark applied the mural with a luminous paint, so that it would glow when exposed to ultraviolet light and mimic the appearance of stained glass. This distinctive black-lit mural is a notable feature of the church, and is believed to be the only one of its kind.<sup>35</sup>

While the building was dedicated in January 1960, the auxiliary chapel and other spaces on the basement level were not yet complete at this time. A final Certificate of Occupancy for the building, which accounted for these basement-level spaces, was issued in 1964.

The building has been continuously occupied by the Church of Religious Science since its construction in 1959. No major development changes have occurred on the site since that time. In 2002, the building was locally designated as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument.

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<sup>32</sup> "Crowning of a Cult," *Newsweek*, Jan. 11, 1960, 59.

<sup>33</sup> "New Church Dedicated by Religious Science," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 4, 1960.

<sup>34</sup> Founder's Church of Religious Science "History", accessed Mar. 2019.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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“Work Advances on Church Edifice in Wilshire District.” *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 11, 1959.

Williams, Paul R. “If I Were Young Today.” *Ebony* (Aug. 1963), 56.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: Property owner's personal files

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.063901 Longitude: -118.293787

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California, Lot FR, Block 2 of Copenhagen Tract. 140 feet along north property line, 140 feet along West Sixth Street (south), 145 feet along east property line, 130 feet along North Berendo Street (west).

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property lines are the legally recorded boundary lines.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Andrew Goodrich, AICP; Kelsey Kaline  
organization: Architectural Resources Group  
street & number: 360 E 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Suite 225  
city or town: Los Angeles state: CA zip code: 90012  
e-mail [a.goodrich@arg-la.com](mailto:a.goodrich@arg-la.com)  
telephone: 626.583.1401  
date: April 2019

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property:	Founder's Church of Religious Science
City or Vicinity:	Los Angeles
County:	Los Angeles
State:	California
Photographer:	Andrew Goodrich
Date Photographed:	April 2019

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Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 14 South (primary) and west elevations, view northeast
- 2 of 14 South (primary) elevation, view north
- 3 of 14 South (primary) elevation, view northwest
- 4 of 14 West elevation, view northeast
- 5 of 14 East elevation, view southwest
- 6 of 14 North elevation, view southwest
- 7 of 14 Detail of south (primary) elevation, view east
- 8 of 14 Breezeblock accent wall, view west
- 9 of 14 Garden and forecourt, view west
- 10 of 14 Interior, main lobby, view east
- 11 of 14 Interior, sanctuary and mural, view north
- 12 of 14 Interior, sanctuary balcony, view west
- 13 of 14 Interior, chapel (basement level), view east
- 14 of 14 Interior, multi-purpose room (basement level), view northwest

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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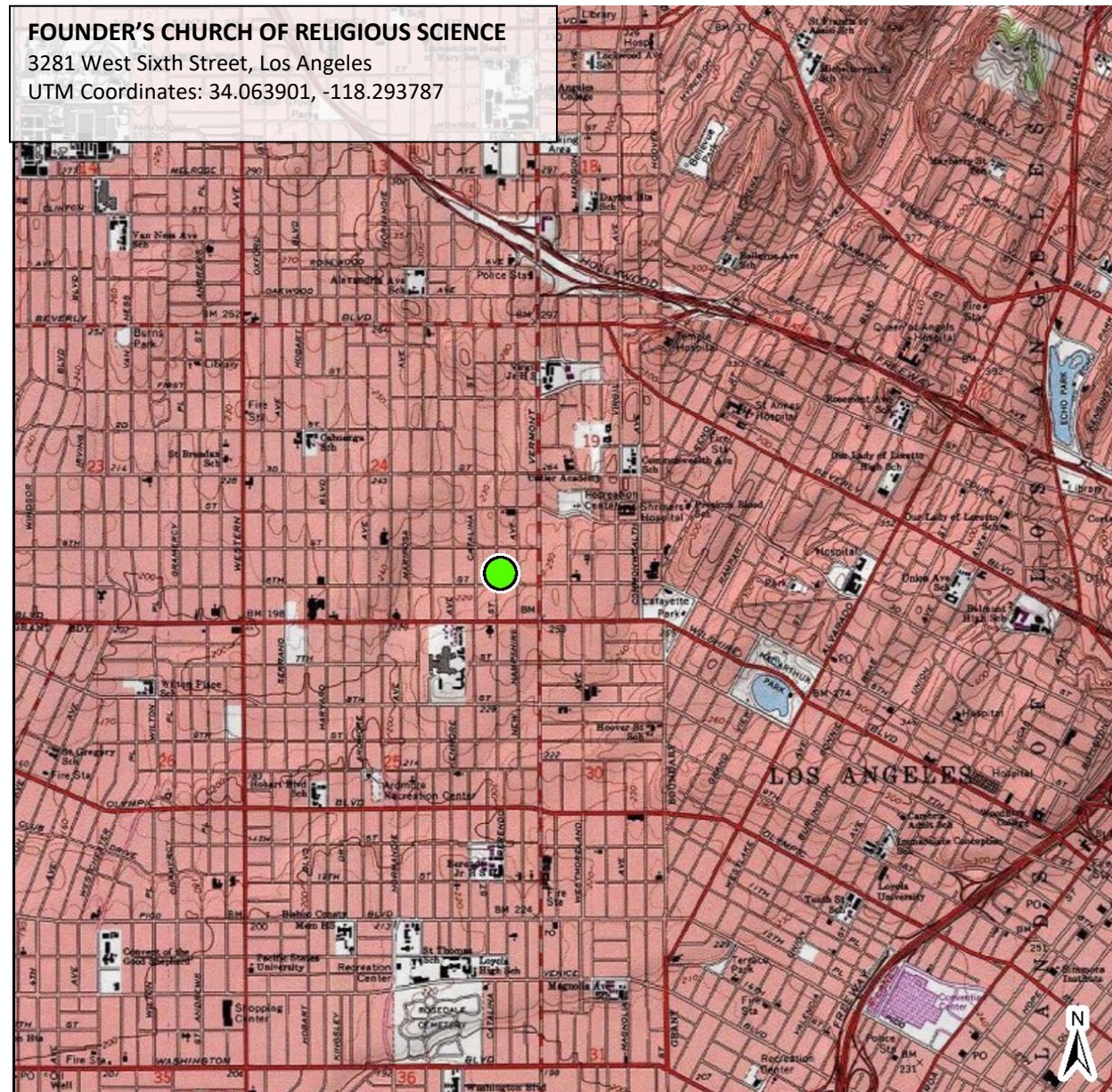
### Location Map



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### USGS Map

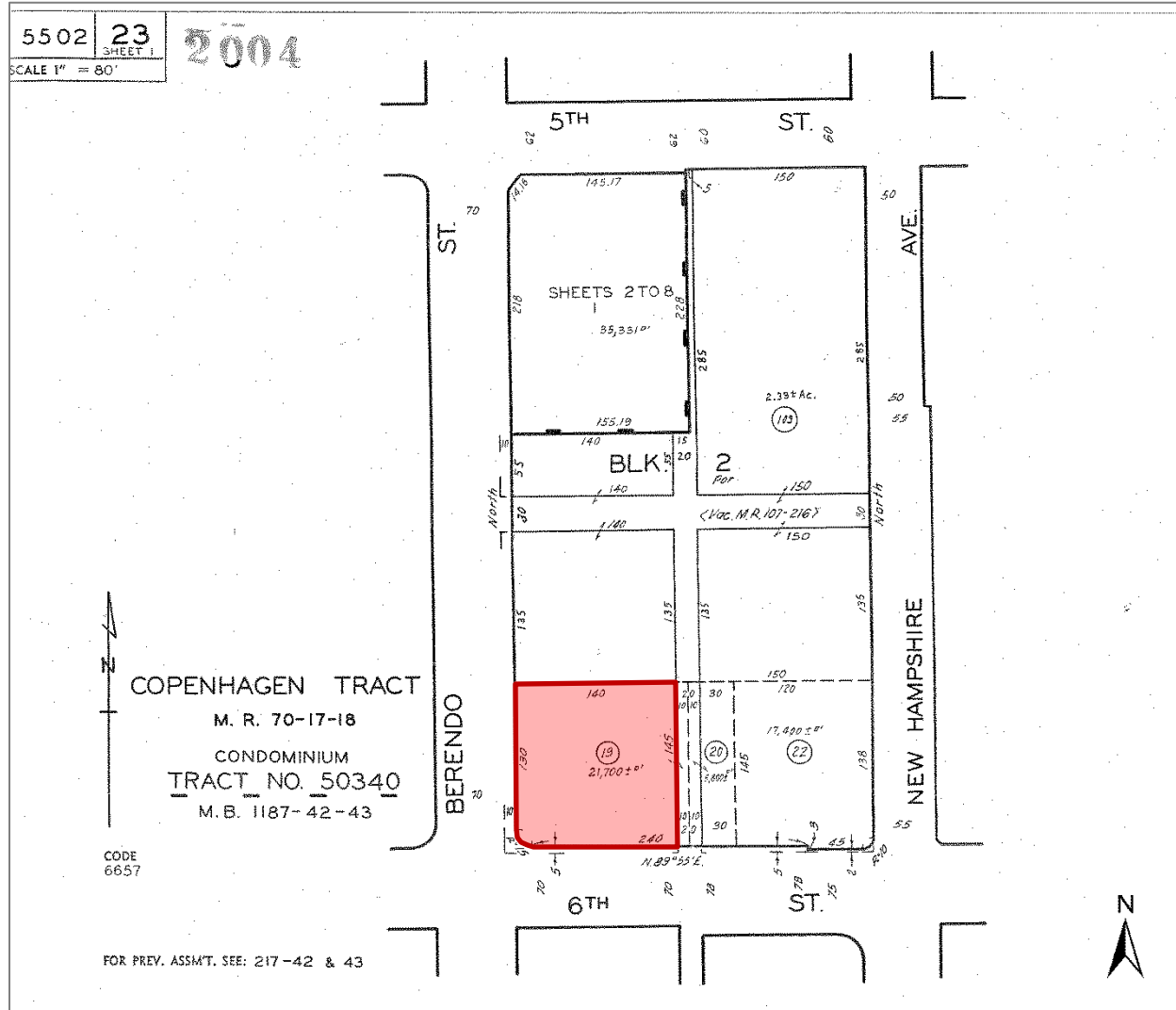




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### Site Map

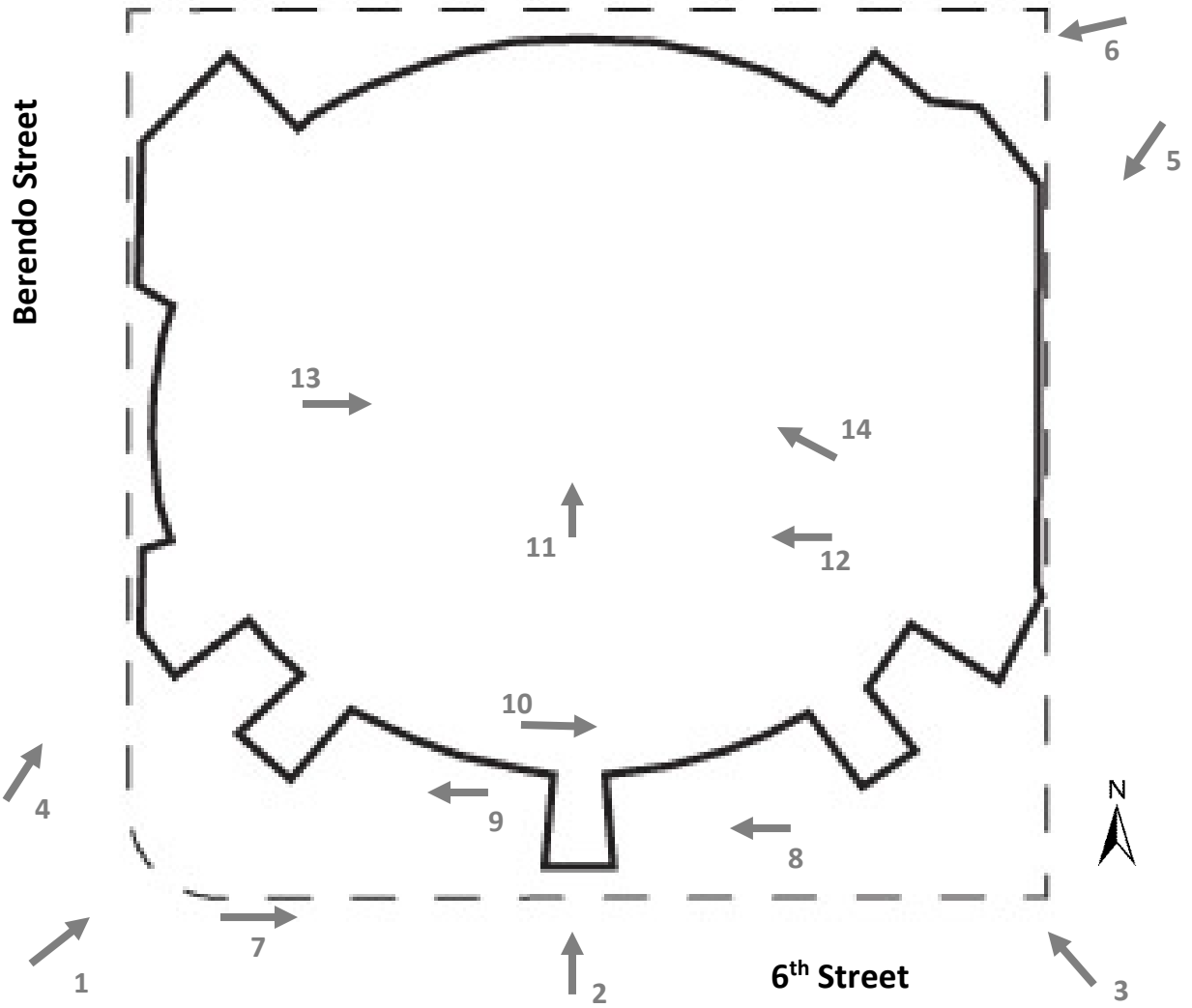


Founder's Church of Religious Science, 3281 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles. The parcel is shaded red.  
Source: Los Angeles County of the Assessor

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**Sketch Map/Photo Key**



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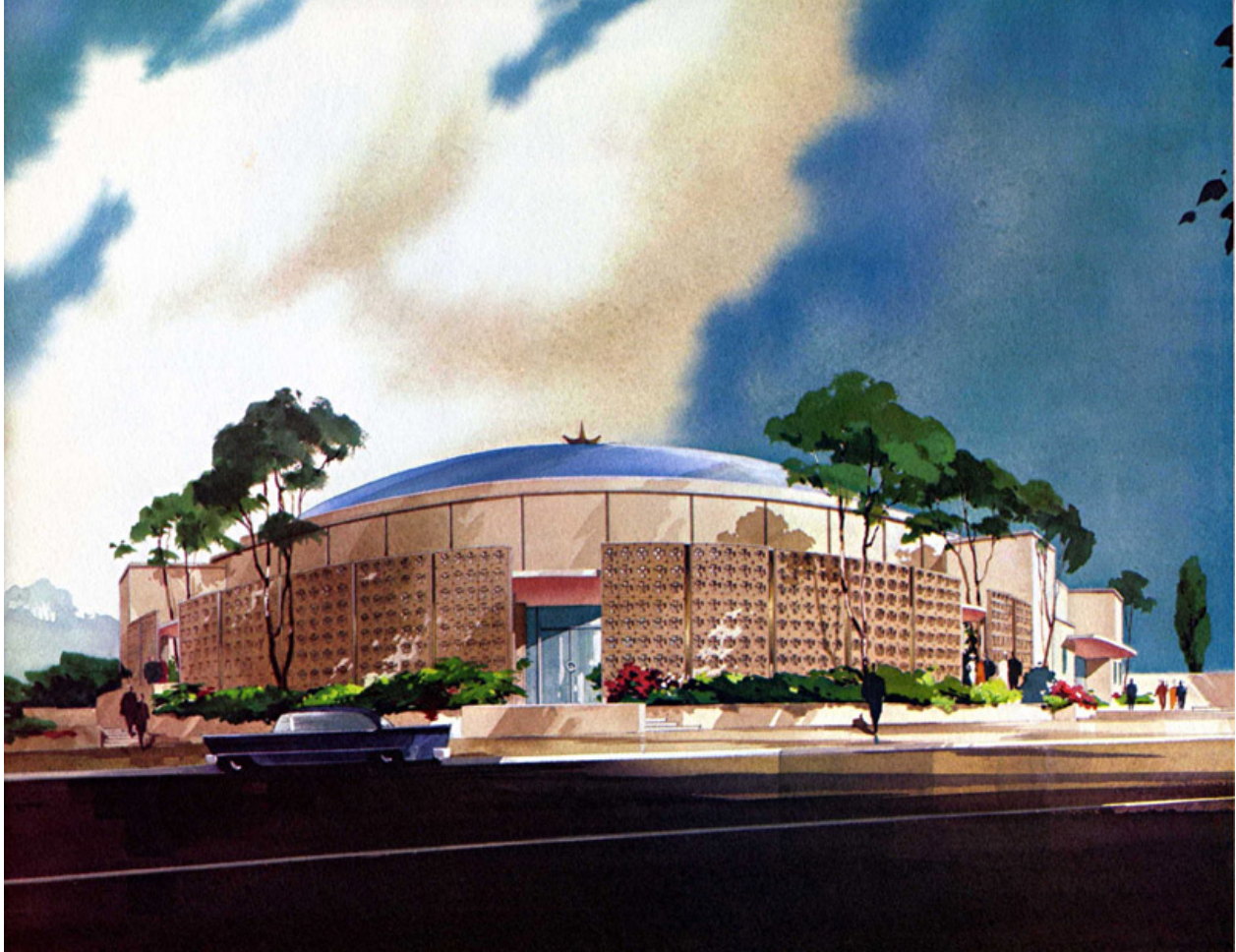
**Figure 1.** Founder's Church of Religious Science, view northeast, 1965. Julius Shulman  
Photographic Archive, Research Library,



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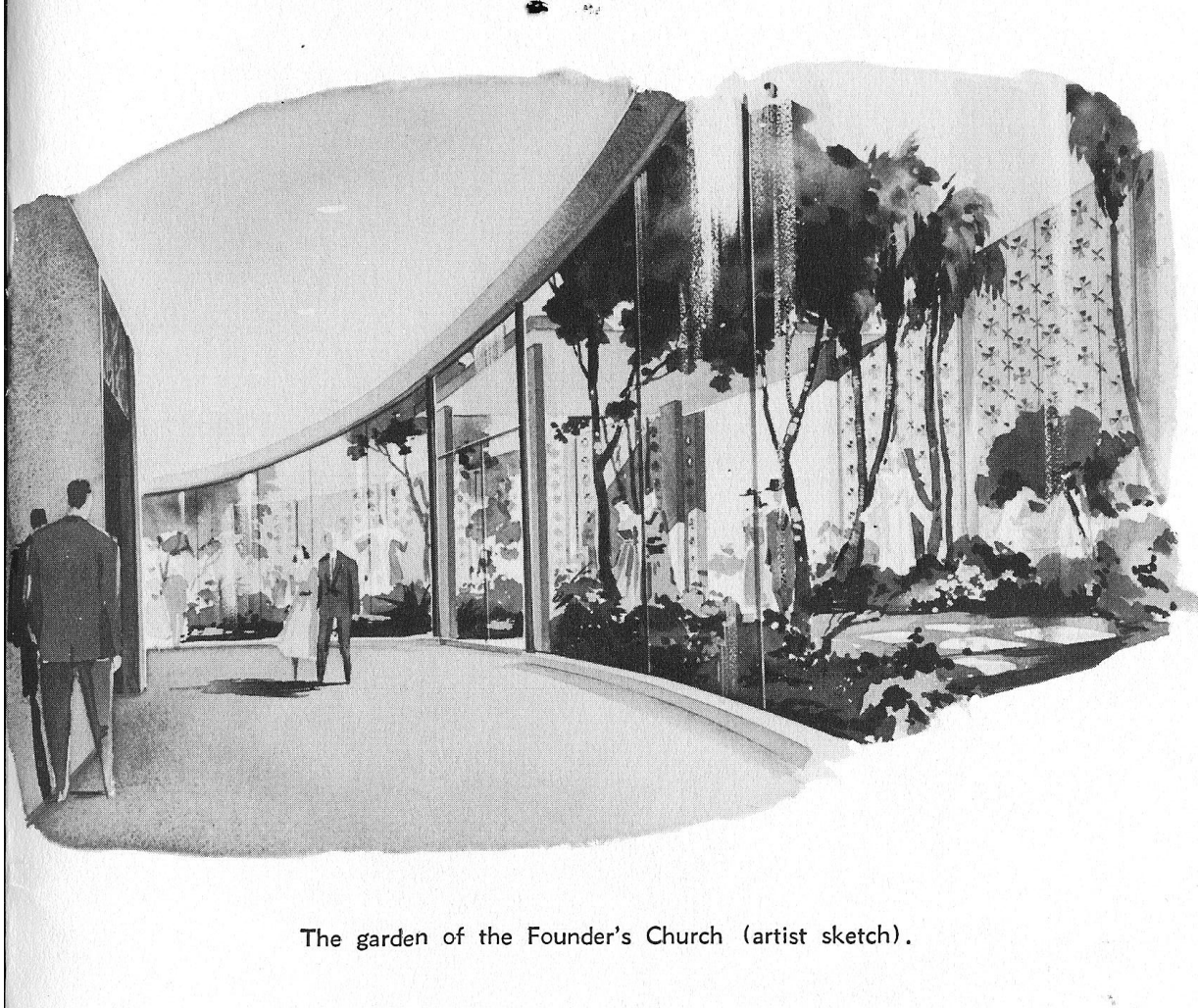
**Figure 2.** Rendering of Paul Williams design for the Founder's Church of Religious Science, ca. 1950s. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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**Figure 3.** Artist sketch of the garden on the primary (south) elevation, ca. 1950s. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.

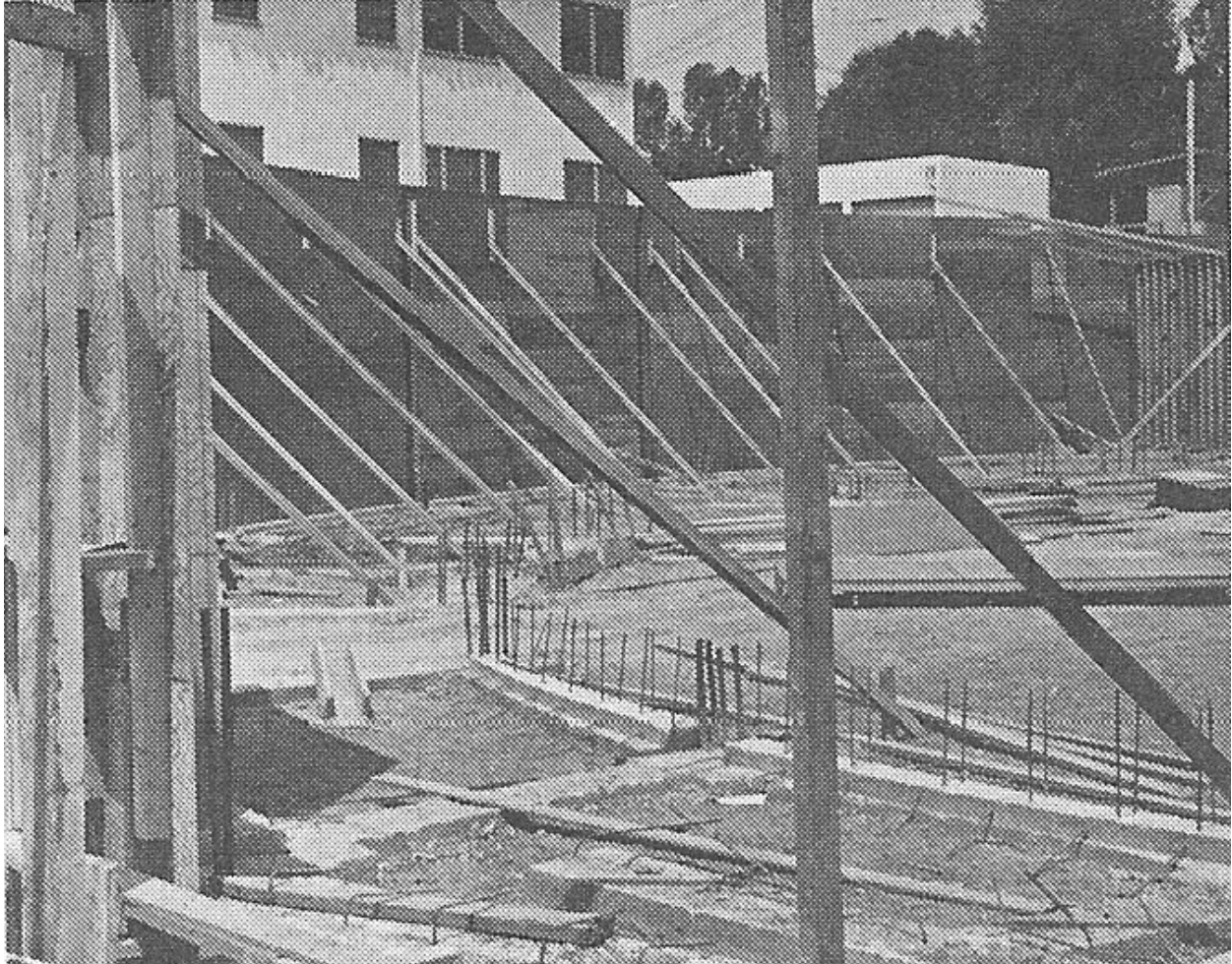


The garden of the Founder's Church (artist sketch).

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**Figure 4.** Construction of Founder's Church of Religious Building, view northeast, ca. 1958.  
Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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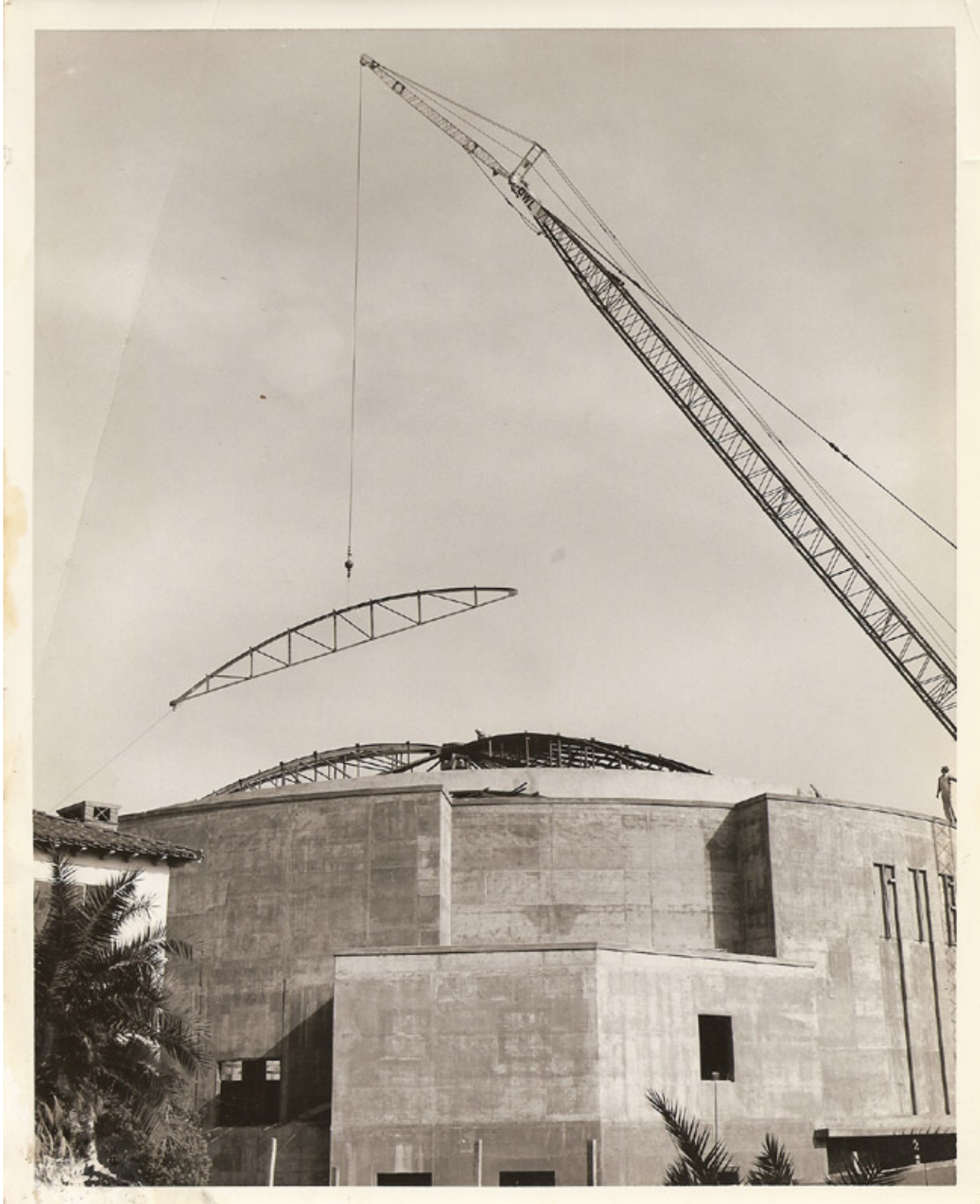
**Figure 5.** Construction of Founder's Church of Religious Building with neighborhood context, view northeast, ca. 1958. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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**Figure 6.** Construction of Founder's Church of Religious Building, view southeast, ca. 1958.  
Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.





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**Figure 7.** Founder's Church of Religious Science, view northeast, ca. 1960s. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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**Figure 8.** Sanctuary from balcony level, view northwest, n.d. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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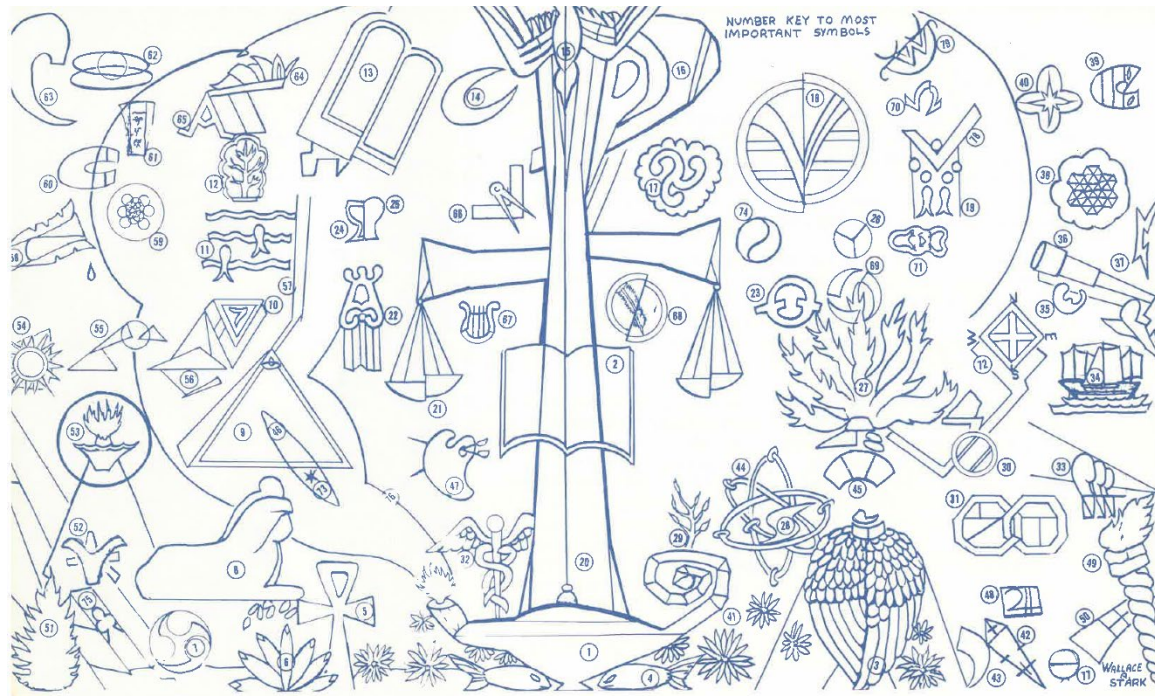
**Figure 9.** Dedication of basement-level chapel, view east, 1964. Founder's Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



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**Figure 10.** Key to the “Wisdom of the Ages” Mural by Wallace Roland Stark, ca. 1960s.  
Founder’s Church of Religious Science, Private Collection.



#### KEY TO SYMBOLY OF THE MURAL

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Lamp of Knowledge  | 27. Seven Flames (Seven Gifts of the Spirit) | 53. Geology                             |
| 2. Holy Bible   | 28. The Form of Spirit In Action             | 54. The Sun (Radiation of Life)         |
| 3. All Encompassing Spirit                                    | 29. Olive Branch (Peace)                     | 55. Mathematics                         |
| 4. The Unawakened Consciousness                               | 30. Law of Action and Reaction               | 56. Balance (Universal Order)           |
| 5. Key to the Nile (Hermetic)                                 | 31. Power of Mind Activated by Spirit        | 57. Universal Pattern                   |
| 6. Lotus Flower (Buddhism)                                    | 32. The Healing Arts (Egypt)                 | 58. Chemistry                           |
| 7. Unity—Eastern Concept of Body, Mind and Spirit             | 33. Anthropology                             | 59. Nuclear Science                     |
| 8. The Sphinx (Egyptian)                                      | 34. Navigation                               | 60. Polarity                            |
| 9. Pyramid (Egyptian)   | 35. Embryo (Spirit of Life)                  | 61. Rosetta Stone (Early Communication) |
| 10. Jehovah (Hebrew)  | 36. Astronomy                                | 62. Physics                             |
| 11. Spiritual Consciousness                                   | 37. Energy                                   | 63. Outer Space                         |
| 12. The Burning Bush (Spiritual Unfoldment)                   | 38. Hexagon (Spiritual Sight)                | 64. Agricultural Science                |
| 13. Ten Commandments  | 39. The Four Seasons                         | 65. Philology                           |
| 14. Islam   | 40. Star of the East                         | 66. Manual Arts (Square and Compass)    |
| 15. Descent of Spirit   | 41. Vegetation                               | 67. The Lyre (Musical Arts)             |
| 16. Threefold Nature of God In Man                            | 42.-48. Metallurgy                           | 68. Literature                          |
| 17. God Head (Hermetic Tradition)                             | 43. Gravitation                              | 69. Progress (Eternal Change)           |
| 18. Religious Science   | 44. Pure Science                             | 70. Law of Attraction and Growth        |
| 19. Loaves and Fishes (New Testament)                         | 45. Keystone (Architecture)                  | 71. The Dramatic Arts                   |
| 20. The Eternal Cross of Life                                 | 46. Mystery of Life                          | 72. Education (Contemporary)            |
| 21. Scales of Justice   | 47. The Creative Arts                        | 73. The Everpresent Spirit              |
| 22. Alpha (Greek)   | 48. (See 42)                                 | 74. Ying Yang (Chinese)                 |
| 23. Omega (Greek)   | 49. The Olympic Torch (Physiology)           | 75. Botany                              |
| 24.-25. The Chalice—Spiritual Givingness and Man's Acceptance | 50. Precious Metals                          | 76. Unitary Wholeness                   |
| 26. Eternity (Egypt)  | 51. Cosmology                                | 77. Salt (Preservation of Life)         |
|   | 52. Faith                                    |   |