
FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST

256 NE 19TH Street and 1836 Biscayne Blvd

Designation Report



Historic and Environmental Preservation Board



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER,
MEGAN SCHMITT
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST
AS A HISTORIC RESOURCE

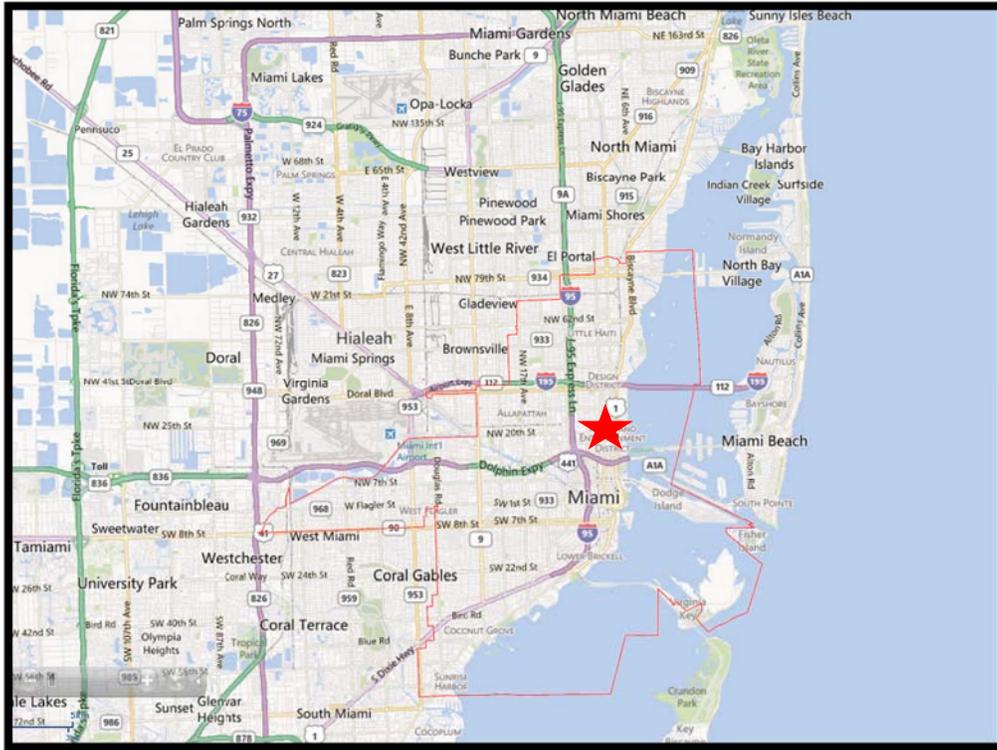
Written by:

Marina Novaes
Historic Preservation Planner II

Dr. William Hopper
HEPB chairman

Date: September 2015

Location and site maps



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I- General Information

Historic Name: First Church of Christ, Scientist

Current Name: First Church of Christ, Scientist

Date of Construction: 1925

Architect: August Geiger

Builder: C. A. Taylor

Location: 256 NE 19th St and 1836 Biscayne Blvd - Miami, Florida

Present Owner: Fifteen 1836 Biscayne, LLC

Present use: Vacant

Zoning: T6-36B-O

Folio No.: 01-3231-003-0270 & 01-3231-042-0020

Boundary (Legal Description): MIRAMAR PB 5-4 LOTS 1 TO 4 INC &
PARCEL 6A AS PER PB 51-98 BLK 5 LOT
SIZE 24150 SQ FT

BISC FEDL PLAZA 1ST ADDN
PB 116-7 TR C & S1/2 OF 10FT ALLEY LYG N &
ADJ CLOSED PER R 13-169 LOT SIZE 17084 SQ FT
COC 24262 4929 02 2006 1

Setting: The First Church of Christ, Scientist is situated on the southwest corner of Biscayne Boulevard and N.E. 19th Street. The building occupies virtually the entire site.

Integrity: The First Church of Christ, Scientist possesses integrity of setting, felling, design, association, materials, and location.

II- Statement of Significance

According to the National Register Bulletin "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties, "a religious property is eligible if it derives its primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance. A religious property requires justification on architectural, artistic, or historical grounds to avoid any appearance of judgment by the government about the validity of any religion or belief. Historic significance for religious property cannot be established on the merits of a religious doctrine, but rather, for architectural or artistic values or for significant historic or cultural forces that the property represents."¹

The Christian Science is one of few religions originated in America.² Founded by the youngest of six children of a Puritan family. Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) was born on a farm in Bow, New Hampshire. She was raised in a deeply religious Calvinist Congregational home and due to her frail health she was homeschooled for most of her childhood.³

Constantly struggling with her health, Eddy sought relief from her illnesses in alternative treatments such as homeopathy that she studied in depth. Later, in 1862 she met Phineas Quimby, a famous healer in Portland, Maine who used a treatment method called "therapeutic touch."⁴ Puzzled by Quimby's technique Eddy became his pupil as she wanted to learn more about his approach that she believed was based on Jesus' healing teachings.

In 1866, Eddy fell on a slippery sidewalk that left her in bed in critical condition, and since Quimby had passed away a month before, she could not seek his aid. Eddy found comfort in the Bible and after a few days of praying assiduously she felt suddenly well, this event led her to "discover" Christian Science.

Convinced that her faith had cured her, she wrote a book over the course of nine years of profound scriptural study. "Science and Health" were published in 1875; in this book she reveals what she understood to be the "science" behind Jesus' healing method.

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. How to apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. National Register Bulletin. http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm 6/10/2015.

² Chiat, Marilyn J. "America's religious Architecture – Sacred places for Every Community." Preservation Press, John Wiley & Sons, INC. 1997. Page 9

³ The Mary Baker Eddy Library. Discover an Extraordinary Life – Explore an Amazing World. <http://www.marybakereddylibrary.org/mary-baker-eddy/life> 6/10/2015

⁴ *ibid*

Mary Baker Eddy believed that spiritual reality is the only reality and that the material world – including sickness and death – is an illusion.⁵ Eddy started to teach Christian Science to the people of her community and soon she had a great number of followers. In 1879, she founded the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Lynn, Massachusetts.

The Christian Science faith is based on reading passages of the scriptures that are afterward explained by Eddy's book "Science and Health" and on the testimony of people healed by her method.

The religion's assurance that diseases are an illusion and not real assumes that patients should not be treated by medicine but by prayer. The rejection of medical care led many devotees to death, including children as their parents refused to seek medical help. Several people, mostly parents were prosecuted for manslaughter or neglect. As a result, in 2010, the Church made a statement that Christian Science should be seen as a complement to conventional medicine, not as a substitute for it.⁶

In 1894, the "Mother Church of Christian Science" was built in Boston, MA; this first modest church was in the Romanesque style with beautiful stained glass windows. In 1906 a massive addition to the main church was built in the Neoclassical Revival style inspired by the City Beautiful Movement in Chicago (1893) that suggested that pure, rational architectural forms could reform not only the city's physical fabric but produce upright, efficient and moral citizens.⁷

This magnificent addition was decorated with floral garlands and textual quotations from the Bible and Eddy on its massive walls which became characteristic of the Church of Christ, Scientist all over the U.S. in the 1910s and 1920s. The "Word" became the Church's sacred decorations or "declarations" on the walls of their auditoriums. The Neoclassical Revival architecture itself became a symbol of the Church of Christ, Scientist and most temples erected during these decades were built in this style.

Solon S. Berman, a Chicago architect, Christian Science convert, and designer of the Mother Church's addition wrote in 1907 about the affinity between the

⁵ Wikipedia. 2015. "Christian Science." Last modified on June 4, 2015.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Science

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Mary Baker Eddy Library. Discover an Extraordinary Life – Explore an Amazing World.

<http://www.marybakereddylibrary.org/mary-baker-eddy/life/6/10/2015>

classical style and the Christian Science belief. He said that "architecture along classic lines has found most favor with Christian Science because the style with its sense of calm, power and dignity... its true systems of proportion, its sincerity and refinement, and ... its rationalism, seems to represent the faith of those who employ it in their house of worship."⁸ Charles D. Faulkner, another prominent Chicago church architect, and Christian Science follower wrote in his 1946 book "Christian Science Church Edifices:"

"...Large, geometrically patterned leaded glass windows of pale muted color permit ample entry of natural light. Curved ceilings with long radii, creating relatively flat vaults, enhance acoustics. Inclined auditorium floors with seating arranged bowl-like around the reader's desk produce an optimum line of vision. Simple wall treatment on the interior, with design emphasis in and around the raised reader's platform, focuses attention on the lesson-sermon. Generously sized foyers with multiple stairs leading into the auditorium (sometimes installed in the middle of the seating) facilitate the movement of people."⁹

The First Church of Christ, Scientist was organized in Miami in 1916. After meeting at various places throughout downtown, a temporary structure was erected at the corner of NE 4th Street and 2nd Avenue. Due to a rapid increase in attendance, a larger edifice was voted upon by members of the congregation in 1923. The present site was purchased by the Church, and the ground was broken on 2 May 1924. Although the church auditorium was already in use since 1925, the congregation chose not to dedicate the church formally until all debts were paid. The formal dedication took place on 7 March 1937.¹⁰

Miami's First Church of Christ, Scientist was built in 1925 in the Christian Science traditional style, Neoclassical Revival. The architect commissioned for the job was the prominent August Geiger.

August Geiger was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in September 1887. As a teenager, he and his family used to come to South Florida on vacations, he enjoyed the climate so much that he permanently moved to Miami in 1905 after

⁸ Stiritz, Mimi. "Missouri's Christian Science Churches Reflect Ideals of Rational Theology" Preservation Issues, vol. 2, No. 6. Department of Natural Resources – Historic Preservation Program. 1992.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Eaton, Sarah and Welcher, Vicki L. NRHP Nomination 8DA1115. 1988.

completing his formal education at Boardman's Manual Training School and working as architect in a New Haven firm for some time.¹¹

Upon arriving in Miami, Geiger worked for a local architectural firm for six years before opening his own practice; later in 1915 he opened a second office in Palm Beach, FL. Geiger is best known for introducing the Spanish Colonial / Mediterranean style to South Florida.¹²

Geiger's specialty architectural style was very popular with the wealthy industrial class who vacationed in the sunshine state during the winter. However, he designed several buildings in many different styles such as Mission, Italian Renaissance, Neoclassical Revival, and Art Deco throughout South Florida.

Geiger became the official architect of Carl Fisher designing several buildings in Miami Beach including Carl Fisher's house, the Lincoln Hotel (Miami Beach's first hotel), and the Miami Beach Municipal Golf Course. In addition, he was the appointed architect for the Dade County School Board.¹³

Many of Geiger's creations are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; his masterpieces are spread all over Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties. Just to list a few within the City of Miami: Villa Serena (1913); Southside School addition (1914); The Alamo (1915); Hindu Temple (1920); Fire Station No. 2 (1924); Dade County Courthouse in association with A. Ten Eyck Brown (1925); Miami Women's Club (1925); and First Church of Christ, Scientist (1925), all listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

The First Church of Christ, Scientist at 256 NE 19TH Street represents an outstanding example of Neoclassical Revival style in Miami-Dade County and is also a remarkable design of August Geiger's, one of the most prominent architect of his time in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties.¹⁴

¹¹ Cullison, David and Leynes, Jennifer Brown. "Biscayne National Park – Historic Resource Study." January 1998 <http://www.nps.gov/bisc/historyculture/upload/bischistoricresourcestudy.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Florida DHR. "Great Floridians 2000." http://dos.myflorida.com/media/693491/great_floridians_pdf.pdf 6/10/2015

¹⁴ Eaton, Sarah and Welcher, Vicki L. NRHP Nomination 8DA1115. 1988.

III- Description

The First Church of Christ, Scientist was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1988. The structure is an outstanding example of Neoclassical Revival architecture style; its structural system is comprised of terracotta tile and poured concrete, the exterior walls are clad in Indiana limestone [1], with the foundation and entrance steps constructed of Mt. Airy granite [2].

The NRHP Nomination report of 1988 written by Sarah Eaton and Vicki L. Welcher has a very precise description of the building included below with some corrections, illustrations and complementation by William E. Hopper, Ph.D. ¹⁵This description remains accurate today.

“The exterior of the church is characterized by a classically-inspired façade running parallel to Biscayne Boulevard [3]. The principal elevation is comprised of six colossal Ionic columns [4, 5] dividing a recessed portico into seven bays. There are granite steps leading up to the recessed portico and side doors [6] from the sidewalk level. On either side of the principal elevation are end bays without any type of openings. A large entablature [7] unifies the end bays to the central portico. Atop the entablature spanning the portico is a flat masonry parapet that serves to conceal the flat roofline behind it.

The side elevations of the church are characterized by tall multi-pane opalescent sheet glass [8] windows [9] that serve to emphasize the height of the main auditorium, which is non-regular octagonal in design. Smaller windows below [10] provide light for the lounges [11] below the vestibule. The fenestration of the building is original, with the window sash set into metal frames. Metal frames have been affixed to the exterior of the lower two window panels [12], dividing them horizontally into thirds, giving the windows a more interesting rhythm [13, 14]. A granite water table [15] wraps around the entire building. The rear of the church building is characterized by a slightly shorter extension [16, 17] (Sunday-School room) that follows the external composition of the side

¹⁵ *William E. Hopper is Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Studies, Director of the Center for Urban Environmental Studies, and Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness at Florida Memorial University. He earned a BS with Honors from Oklahoma State University and an MS and PhD from the University of South Carolina in Chemistry and a second MS from Florida International University in Environmental Science. He has served on the Historic Environmental Preservation Board since 2007 and as chairman since 2008. He has been involved in historic preservation efforts through the Morningside Civic Association and lives in a 1934 Kiehnel and Elliott house in Bay Shore (Morningside), Miami's first historic district.*

elevations. There are seven uniformly spaced bays that comprise the semi-circular rear elevation [18. 19].

Five double doors set within the recessed portico lead to a large vestibule [20]. The auditorium is entered through seven double doors [21] leading down two long and two short side aisles and two center aisles into the main auditorium [22]. The auditorium is ramped down to the platform rostrum [23], which is at the same level as the vestibule. Two-story pilasters [24] and cantons [25] with simple capitals [26] divide the walls and separate the windows [27] and door openings, as well as the rostrum, with their bases at the level of the floor of the vestibule. There are seven windows on either side of the auditorium containing simple opalescent sheet glass window panes set within metal frames. The rostrum [28] is framed by a low curved coffered wall [29] below and the organ chamber and exposed pipework [30] above. Dividing the rostrum are two full-height pillars with simple capitals [31].

The interior walls of the auditorium are embellished with stylized classical wreath motifs [32]. The front short sides of the non-regular octagon are engraved with quotations in gold leaf [33]. The major portion of the auditorium ceiling is embellished with a shallow recessed coffered dome [34] with an opalescent sheet glass oculus [35]. Ceiling coffers fill the spaces between the dome and the exterior walls [36]. A simple entablature serves as a cornice that wraps around the perimeter of the auditorium [37]. There are folding seats set within the curved pews [38] and the seating capacity in both the auditorium and rear gallery [39] accommodates 1200 people [40]. The church building contains two auditoria [41], a transverse hallway, several meeting and specialty rooms [42, 43, 44], and a large space used for storage [45] below the vestibule. In all, the exterior and interior of the church building remain virtually unaltered from the day they were completed, with the single exception of window air conditioning units [46] and ceiling air conditioning vents [47].

An illustration from the AIA Yearbook of 1939 [48], historical postcards [49, 50] are included, along with the Tax Assessor's photo [51] from 1939."

It is noticeable that the building still encompasses all original features including the characteristics described as typical to Christian Science churches built in the 1910s and 1920s. The building's exterior and interior are both in an impeccable degree of conservation.

IV- Application of Criteria for Designation

The First Church of Christ, Scientist at 256 NE 19TH Street / 1836 Biscayne Blvd represents an outstanding example of Neoclassical Revival style in Miami-Dade County and is also a remarkable design of August Geiger's, one of the most prominent architect of his time in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties.¹⁶

The First Church of Christ, Scientist has significance as it relates to the historic heritage of Miami and possesses integrity of setting, materials, feeling, design, and location. The property is eligible for designation as a historic site under the criteria (5) and (6) as numbered in Sec. 23-4 (a), of Chapter 23 of the City Code.

(5) Embody those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction;

(6) Are an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

¹⁶ Eaton, Sarah and Welcher, Vicki L. NRHP Nomination 8DA1115. 1988.

V- Bibliography

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http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm 6/10/2015.
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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Science

VI- Photographs



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

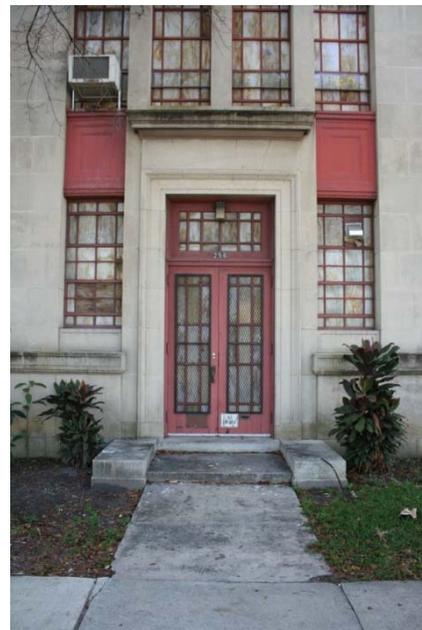


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

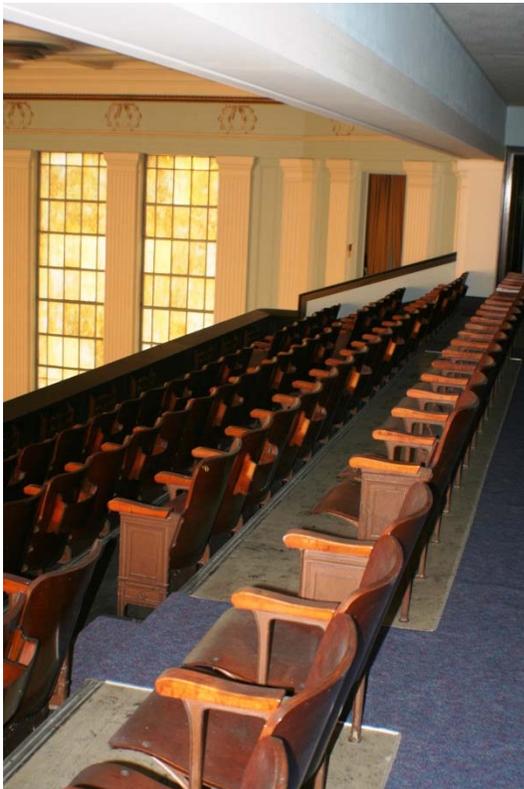


Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41

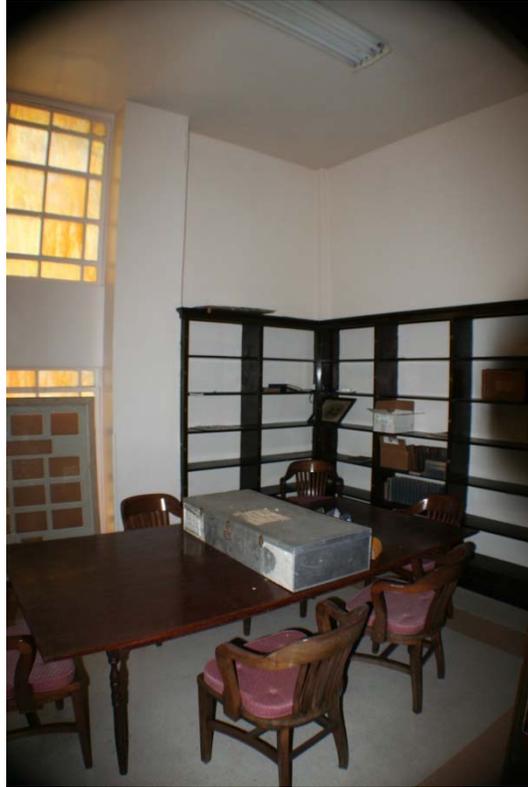


Figure 42



Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46



Figure 47

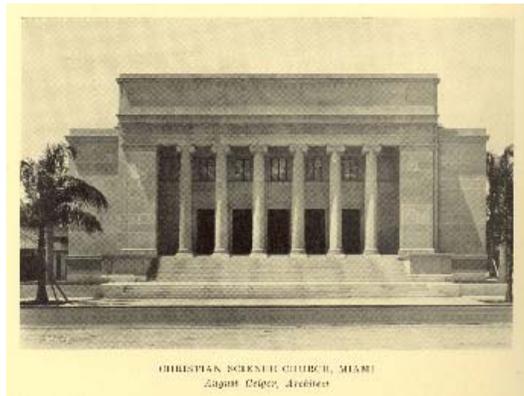


Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50



Figure 51