

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Mason Temple, Church of God in Christ

other name/site number: Church of God in Christ National Temple and World Headquarters

2. Location

street & number: 958 Mason Street not for publication: N/A

city/town: Memphis vicinity: N/A

state: TN county: Shelby code: 157 zip code: 38126

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
7	-0-	buildings
-0-	-0-	sites
-0-	-0-	structures
-0-	-0-	objects
7	-0-	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Herbert L. Hays _____ 2/24/92
Signature of certifying official Date
Deputy SHPO, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register _____ John A. B... 4/10/92
See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register _____
See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register _____
 removed from the National Register _____
 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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6. Function or Use

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Historic: RELIGION	Sub: religious structure
RELIGION	church-related residence
Current : RELIGION	Sub: religious structure
RELIGION	church-related residence

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Art Moderne

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof ASPHALT
 walls STONE, Brick other brick

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Mason Temple was built between 1940 and 1945 as the national headquarters of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the largest Pentecostal African-American denomination in the world today. Located at 930 Mason Street in the city of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, Mason Temple is the centerpiece of a group of six additional buildings that form the COGIC World Headquarters complex, all built through time from 1945 to ca. 1965 to support the Temple, its local, national and world-wide activities as a denomination.

The COGIC World Headquarters complex occupies the near-equivalent of a half city block, bound by McEwen Place (formerly Long Place) on the north, Willoughby Street on the east, Walker Avenue on the south and Mason Street (formerly South Fifth Street) on the west, in an area of South Memphis formerly occupied by residences built largely at the turn of the century. As such, the site of the complex retains some of the basic site characteristics of a residential setting, including its placement atop a low land terrace above the street. However, setbacks from the street for most of the buildings in the complex exceeds the residential norm for the surrounding area, ranging from as little as forty feet for the C. H. Mason residence to as much as eighty feet for the Temple and the old Publishing House. Street trees, curb cuts and similar characteristics of residential settings do not survive from the earlier use of the site.

Mason Temple is naturally the largest structure in the complex, intended for regular services as well as to house the annual national conventions of church representatives, called "Saints". It is a vast structure, measuring roughly 134 feet in width by 200 feet in length capable of seating for 7,500 people on two levels. The building is constructed of poured in-place reinforced concrete masonry covered with brick, stone and cast stone veneers. Two levels of the structure stand above ground, with a full basement level beneath; all available space within the structure was developed with the accommodation in mind of the periodic demands of the denomination's national and local administration.

 X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: National.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : A, G

Areas of Significance: Religion
Ethnic History- African-American

Period(s) of Significance: 1945-1968

Significant Dates: 1945; April 3, 1968

Significant Person(s): Mason, C. H.

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Taylor, W.H.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Mason Temple and its surrounding World Headquarters complex for the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) were constructed in phases between 1940 and ca. 1960 as the administrative and spiritual center of a denomination that includes some 8,000 congregations in the United States with some 3.7 million members on six continents world-wide (1990 estimate). As such, COGIC is second only to the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. as the largest denomination of African Americans in the United States (Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 77).

The Mason Temple Complex possesses extraordinary significance in African-American history under several applicable National Register criteria. Under Criterion A in the area of religion, Mason Temple and the surrounding complex are nationally significant as the leading center for the development of Pentecostalism in the African-American community as a major religious movement, and specifically, as the center of growth and development in the Church of God in Christ denomination. Also under Criterion A, in the area of African-American history, Mason Temple is significant on the national level for its association with events in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). It was here, on April 3, 1968, that Dr. King's famous "Mountaintop" speech was delivered, his final public speech before his assassination at the Lorraine Motel the next day. Finally, under Criterion B in the area of religion, Mason Temple complex is significant at the national level for its association with Charles H. Mason (1862-1961), the founder of the Church of God in Christ who oversaw the construction of the entire complex and who fostered the growth of his denomination to a point of national and international prominence, a point of prominence that occurred largely following the construction of Mason Temple and the World Headquarters complex. Mason Temple is the most significant structure still standing which best reflects the life and work of Mason as a religious leader.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office: Tenn. Historical Commission
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 6.0 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	16	768940	3890320	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

_____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: The property placed in nomination includes all property within the Block 42 of Ward 13 in the City of Memphis bound by McEwen Place on the north, Willoughby Street on the east, Walker Avenue on the south and Mason Street on the west, save for the exclusion of out parcels 3, 4, and 5 of Block 42 as delineated on the enclosed Shelby County tax assessor's map I 7.

Boundary Justification: The boundary of the nomination contains all of the property associated with Mason Temple and the COGIC World Headquarter's complex during the period of historic significance.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: John Linn Hopkins

Organization: Preservation Consultant

Date: September 15, 1991

Street & Number: 974 Philadelphia Street

Telephone: (901) 278-5186

City or Town: Memphis

State: TN ZIP: 38104

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As a building type, Mason Temple possesses certain affinities with traditions in church architecture, theaters and public auditoriums constructed during the first half of the twentieth century. The plan of the Temple is laid out with a two-story entrance block containing foyer, stair core and meeting rooms placed in front (west) of the body of the taller mass of the auditorium block, oriented to face Mason Street.

The Temple is situated upon a low rise, setback from Mason Street by approximately eighty feet. The sidewalk from Mason Street is laid directly at the curb; a walk as wide as the entrance portal steps up from the street to the entrance. A longitudinal sidewalk crosses in front of the Temple, connecting other buildings and parking areas to the south with the Temple and the Publishing House to the north.

The main entrance block of the Temple is two-stories in height on a raised basement, nine bays in width and two bays in depth, with the central entrance bay projecting above the roof line and forward of the building line of the flanking structure. The wings of the block flanking the entrance bay are covered with a flat, built-up asphalt roof behind a parapet wall topped with a ribbon cornice of cast stone above and below a soldier course of brick. Exterior wall surfaces of these areas are veneered with varietal-colored raked-face brick. Windows are set in plain reveals and contain pairs of twenty-light metal sash casements; a band course of cast stone runs above the windows of the second story. The central entrance bay is covered by a gabled, built-up asphalt roof behind a stepped and curved parapet treatment. Exterior wall surfaces of this portion of the facade are covered with a veneer of random-coursed, dressed-face limestone ashlar.

The architectural styling of the entrance bay is a fine, symmetrical composition of simplified Art Moderne styling and detail. The bay is arranged with 1:3:1 symmetry, focusing the design on the area of the entrance. The entrance bay projects slightly forward of the building line of the main building line, while the one-story mass of the entrance portal projects forward of the entrance bay, all raised on a base of quarry-faced, random-coursed limestone ashlar. The curve of the center portion of the segmental parapet is repeated in a tripartite stained glass window on the second floor, and again in the arched parapet and wide, arched opening of the entrance portal. The flanking bays of the entrance composition contain narrow lights filled with pierced, ornamental cast concrete block; the upper windows are topped with semi-circular arches, the lower ones are simple rectangular openings. All cornices, window and door surrounds feature simple band course treatments of dress-face coursed ashlar. Stacked, telescoping Art Moderne-styled tablets are placed at key architectural points; some project through the parapets to reinforce the 1:3:1 symmetrical relationship. A pair of Beaux Arts octagonal bracket wall sconce luminaires flank the opening of the entrance portal. An original pair of cast concrete Art Moderne kettle drum planters sit upon

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The entrance to the Temple is a replacement for the original, dating from the ca. 1970s. Today, the entrance is made up of a set of two metal frame, single-light double-doors flanking a middle fixed light, topped by a six light transom. Beyond the entrance is the foyer, which is flanked on either side by stairs that provide access to the mezzanines of the second level of the auditorium. The stairs are composed of poured in-place concrete with turned balusters of cast concrete topped by a molded concrete rail; lower stairs beneath each lead to bathroom facilities. The foyer is decorated with original hexagonal suspended globe lighting fixtures in an Art Moderne design. Directly opposite the entrance doors are the original entrance doors to the main floor of the auditorium.

The body of the auditorium stretches some ten bays to the rear from the entrance block. Exterior wall surfaces of the side elevations are covered in raked brick veneer. Two side entrances are featured on the south side of the structure; a third exists on the north. Each entrance contains a pair of replacement single-light metal frame doors. Windows of both the north and south sides vary in fenestration. Larger windows that light the auditorium are arranged in triplets of eight-light metal sash casements, smaller windows for rear office areas are twelve-light metal sash lights. The rear of the property is also clad in raked brick veneer and features a one-story addition dating from ca. 1960. The addition is covered by a flat roof and serves as a shipping and receiving area for the cafeteria kitchens.

To the left and right of the foyer on both levels are room spaces originally set aside to serve as meeting spaces, health care facilities and other functions related to the Temple's purpose as a national conference temple. To the south on the first level are the offices set aside originally for the Senior Bishops; recently the hallway was redecorated in an Art Deco Revival treatment to lead to rooms set aside for the tomb of C. H. Mason (originally located since 1961 in the foyer), and for a recreation of his original office space. The upper level of the foyer/stair core is dominated by the stained glass window, which contains the portrait of C. H. Mason teaching from the Bible. To the north of the foyer are spaces set side for a first aid station and a nursery. The second floor spaces were employed on the south as offices for the Presiding Bishops, and to the north as offices for the Women's Department. The basement level contained a barber shop along with the rest room areas.

Entrance to the main auditorium is gained through a set of three double doors on both levels. The each door of the first and second floors contains six lights arranged in a semi-circular opening. A twenty-light transom is featured above each pair of doors on both levels.

The space for seating in the auditorium can be described as nothing short of vast. The ceiling of the auditorium is supported by six quadrilateral steel trusses that allow a span of 134 feet in the clear.

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The main seating area contains seating for approximately 5,000, arranged in rows of theater-type seating separated by aisles that radiate outward from the pulpit area. The mezzanine-level of the auditorium extends in an elongated horseshoe curve with wings running forward to the line defined by the rostrum; it contains seating for as many as 2,500. The raised rostrum for the Temple is placed nearly in the middle of the auditorium, with a full-width running balustrade of cast concrete to define its separation from the main seating area. The rostrum bows forward into the main seating area at center to accommodate the pulpit, with seating for Senior Bishops behind. Approximately 250 people may be seated in the immediate area of the pulpit. A baptistery with a removable cover is located in the floor in front of the pulpit. The rear balcony area is intended for the seating of a choir of approximately 750 persons. A cast concrete balustrade runs at either side of the choir seating balcony upward with the slope of the seating area.

The area behind and beneath the rostrum and choir seating is set aside for additional uses. Corridors leading from the sides of the rostrum connect with a large secondary auditorium beneath the choir. The secondary auditorium is employed for the assembly of the choir and for additional meeting space. To the outside of the side corridors are banks of offices, originally used for various divisional leaders of the church.

The basement level of the Temple contains many support functions for the use of the Temple during its conventions. Principal access to the basement level is gained through short corridors and stairs located at the sides of the rostrum. A reception lobby running the width of the building is found between the sets of stairs. To the east (rear) of the reception area is its massive cafeteria, supplied by two kitchens and capable of feeding 500-1000 persons per hour, according to informant information. In early years of the Temple's use, the dining hall area of the Temple served double-duty as a hostel for visiting church members who were unable to find or afford local accommodations. Apart from the large bathroom areas located in the front of the basement, the rest of the basement, at center, is given over to storage areas and the massive physical plant of the Temple.

Apart from the Temple, five other principal structures and one secondary building are located on the grounds of the National Headquarters complex. All contribute to the significance of the property in nomination. These structures include:

2. Old Publishing House and Administration Building, built 1957-58.

Two-story, three-bay wide, poured-in-place concrete frame building, designed in a late form of the Art Moderne style. Flat roof covered with built-up asphalt roofing, behind parapet wall. Exterior wall surfaces are covered with bands of brick veneer; red brick employed to set off the

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wide band cornice above the windows of the second floor, between the windows of the first and second floors, and beneath the windows of the first floor as a base. A projecting central entrance bay, reminiscent of the design of Mason Temple, is covered with a veneer of random-coursed, dressed face ashlar. Windows of the facade are of two type: the second level featuring tripartite banks of eight-light metal casements; the first floor features tripartite banks of five-light metal top-hinged casements flanking a center, single fixed light. A single four-light, top-hinged metal casement is featured in the entrance bay above the entrance. The entrance features eight-panel, double-doors with a single-light transom above. The Publishing House was connected to Mason Temple by a simple enclosed walkway in ca. 1960. (C)

3. Lela Mason Hall, built 1934; remodeled 1944.

Two-story, poured-in-place, reinforced concrete frame structure, five bays in width by thirteen bays in depth, designed in a transitional Art Moderne style. The structure is designed with a flat-roofed, one-bay deep block placed in front of a hip-roofed, twelve bay deep rear block. The front block features a flat roof covered with built-up asphalt roofing behind a parapet wall. The parapet features a scalloped band cornice of cast concrete. Exterior wall surfaces are covered with brick veneer. The entrance to the building is centered in the facade and features four-light, two-panel double-doors. The entrance is topped with a stylized Art Moderne lintel treatment of cast concrete. Windows of the front block are topped with cast concrete lintels in imitation of a flat Federal-style arch with a raised keystone; they contain six-over-six, double-hung sash lights. The rear block of the structure features a hip roof with boxed cornice, covered with asphalt shingles. Exterior wall surfaces are covered with brick veneer. Some of the windows of the rear block are set within segmental-arched reveals; others are set within plain rectangular reveals. All feature cast concrete sills and contain six-over-six, double-hung sash lights. (C)

4. John Lee Hall, built 1943-44.

Two-story, poured in-place reinforced concrete frame structure, three bays in width by sixteen bays deep. Complex hip roof with boxed cornice, gablet dormer vents and hipped dormers, covered with asphalt shingles. Hipped dormers contain pairs of six-light casements. Exterior wall surfaces are covered with brick veneer. The principal entrance is located in the front (western) facade facing Mason Street, set with a simple, projecting brick loggia covered with a gable roof with boxed cornice and cornice returns. The entrance contains a single-light, two-panel double-door. Windows of the facade feature pairs of six-over-six double-hung sash lights. The side (northern) facade contains a secondary entrance set within a two bay wide projection centered in the facade: the

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projection contains a pair of single-light metal replacement doors each providing access to a divided internal stair core. Windows of the second level of the entrance bay are paired six-over-six double-hung sash lights; the remaining window bays contain single six-over-six double-hung sash lights. (C)

5. Bailey Guest House, ca. 1960.

One-story, concrete block with brick veneer, five bays in width by two bays in depth, designed in a transitional form of the Ranch House style. Hip and gable roof with gable end vents, wide eaves and boxed cornice, covered with asphalt shingles. Windows are covered and not available for inspection. Entrances are five panel doors. (C)

6. C. H. Mason Residence, built 1958.

One-story, frame with brick veneer residence, four bays in width by four bays deep, designed in the Ranch House style. Complex hip roof with wide overhanging eaves and box cornice, covered with asphalt shingles. Windows are four-light metal casements in pairs and groups three. Principal entrance facing Mason Street contains a multi-paneled, double-door. (C)

Garage, 1958. One-story, frame and brick veneer, two-bay garage with hip roof. (C)

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The establishment of Pentecostalism in the United States in the African-American community is fundamentally linked to two personalities: William J. Seymour (1870-1922) who led the famed "Azusa Street Revival" in Los Angeles in 1906-1909; and C.H. Mason (1862-1961), who founded the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in 1897 and converted the church doctrine to Pentecostalism in 1907 following his attendance at the Azusa Street event (Wilmore, pg. 213; Paris, pg. 23; Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 78-81). Indeed, Mason's impact as a generator of the Pentecostalism movement reached beyond the African-American community alone into the Anglo-American community as well. COGIC's position as the sole incorporated Pentecostal denomination between 1907 and 1914 left COGIC as the only body to which Anglo-American congregations could appeal; subsequently, many white Pentecostal preachers were ordained as COGIC ministers. With Mason's assistance and blessing, a group of white COGIC ministers formed the Assemblies of God denomination in 1914, thus largely ending the bi-racial association between blacks and whites by 1924 (Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 81; Nichol, pg. 219-220).

Charles Harrison Mason was born in the Bartlett area of Shelby County in 1862 to Jerry and Eliza Mason, both of whom were staunch members of the Missionary Baptist Church. The Mason family moved from Shelby County to Plummersville, Arkansas in 1878. Mason was converted to the Missionary Baptist Church in 1880 and later became a Baptist preacher with local license from the Mount Gale Missionary Baptist Church. Though he entered the Arkansas Bible College in 1895, he left the college later in the same year in a dispute over his beliefs in "sanctification" and continued to preach as an evangelist (Sanctification is the belief of perfection following baptism, including the removal of original sin). During this period, Mason became associated with the Reverend Charles P. Jones; together, they organized revivals in Jackson and Lexington, Mississippi. Both were expelled from the Mississippi State Baptist Association in 1896 for their adherence to the principle of sanctification, which caused them to preach without a church in the Lexington, Mississippi area. The home of John Lee (namesake of John Lee Hall in the Mason Temple complex) was made available for services, but soon proved inadequate. Revival services were moved to an abandoned cotton gin in Lexington, where sixty converts banded together to form a Holiness congregation in 1897, originally called "the Church of God". The denomination was incorporated in Memphis in 1897 as the "Church of God in Christ", a name Mason said was revealed to him by God while walking down a street in Little Rock, Arkansas (Lincoln and Mamiya, pgs. 80-81).

Seymour's Azusa Street Revival was well-publicized in the general press as well as in fundamentalist newsletters like the "Way of Faith", published by F. Bartlemen. Accompanied by COGIC ministers D. J. Young and W. J. Jeter, Mason traveled from Memphis to Los Angeles to participate in the groundswell of fervor generated by the event. During the five weeks that the men remained in Los Angeles, all three were baptized as

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Pentecostals by "glossolalia", the practice of speaking in tongues that forms second cornerstone of the COGIC doctrine, with that of sanctification (Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 81; Miller and Williams, pg. 5).

According to one source, Mason's congregation in Memphis was being influenced by the doctrine of glossolalia through the preaching of Glen A. Cook, who also had experienced the practice at Los Angeles. When Mason returned from Los Angeles, he discovered his congregation deeply divided into factions supporting or opposing the doctrine (Nichol, pg. 246). At the first General Assembly of the denomination called in Jackson, Mississippi in August of 1907, the non-Pentecostal faction of the church withdrew under the leadership of Charles P. Jones (Miller and Williams, pg. 5), forming the Church of Christ (Holiness), USA. Another assembly of the church was called in Memphis, where Pentecostalism became accepted as the fundamental doctrine of the Church of God in Christ. Mason was elected to the position of "General Overseer" and later "Chief Apostle" of the denomination, which reportedly contained only about a dozen churches in 1907 (Nichols, pg. 246). Member congregations were limited at the time to the states of Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

Growth of the denomination through the period from 1907 and leading up to the establishment of Mason Temple as the National Temple and World Headquarters of COGIC is very difficult to track. There is little doubt, however, of the effects of the "Great Migrations" (ca. 1910-1935; 1950-1965) of African-Americans out of the South to the industrialized centers of the North as a key factor in establishing the transition of the denomination from a small, regional one to that of a truly national presence (Lincoln and Mamiya, pgs. 82-83). Indeed, it was the established policy of the church and of C. H. Mason to send evangelists northward with members of the migration to establish new jurisdictions for the church in Detroit, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and other urban areas. The appointment of a bishop to oversee the growth of new congregations in new areas followed soon after (for insight, see "The Life and Works of Mary Mangum Johnson: Founder of the Church of God in Christ in the State of Michigan", by Mary Mangum Johnson and Inez Cole Barber, ca. 1935, as quoted in Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 82).

Needless to say, the culture shock encountered by migrating African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North must have been extreme. Success of the new congregations in the north was in part fueled by the growth of Pentecostalism as a doctrine, but also by the familiarity of the emotionalism of the church service to the former Southerners. Since many African-American churches served the dual role of service in both a spiritual and social context, the new churches also served as places for the gathering of the community. The in-migrants were relegated to even more menial employment than the more indigenous population, hence the congregations that developed in the period tended to be of very modest means. In many cases, the "new" COGIC churches in the north were forced to rent commercial storefront space for many years until the congregation was

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able to grow both in numbers and in the status of its members; and thus, to afford a true church building (Paris, pgs. 25-30).

The early growth of COGIC was largely regional in character until well into the first period of the "Great Migration". The first Census of Religious Bodies carried out by the U.S. Census Department in 1926 noted the substantial growth of COGIC to include some 1,444 congregations and some 63,558 members (Nichol, pg. 247). The policy of the church to convene its General Assembly in a National Convocation appears to have occurred annually following the first General Assembly in 1907. The vast size of the Assembly, made up of bishops, elders, pastors and jurisdictional supervisors (called "Saints" at the convocation) caused the denomination to build its first National Temple in 1924 at 958 Fifth Street, the former address of the current site of Mason Temple. The frame auditorium was built solely for the purposes of the annual convocation, held each year in late November for two weeks (the traditional date of the meeting was begun to ensure that Saints living in rural areas in the South could join the convocation following the harvest each autumn). The building reportedly was able to seat some 5,000 people (Commercial Appeal, December 8, 1936). Lela Mason Hall was built in 1934 to support the annual convocation by serving as a women's dormitory for the visiting female Saints.

The original National Temple burned on December 8, 1936 during services as a part of the national convocation. The conclusion of the 1936 convocation was moved to Bishop Mason's own church, the "Home Temple" at 672 South Lauderdale, purchased by COGIC in 1931. The annual convocations remained at the Home Temple until the completion of construction of Mason Temple in 1945 (the Home Temple was destroyed by fire in 1956).

The move to build Mason Temple began in earnest on April 12, 1940 with the commission of Bishop R. F. Williams of Cleveland, Ohio by C. H. Mason to lead the massive construction project. W. H. Taylor, an Elder in the church, was selected as architect, with construction to be supervised by U. E. Miller, the National Secretary for COGIC. Construction of the building began soon after, though progress was slow in coming due to the lack of complete financing for the project and by the restrictions on materials placed on building projects during the course of World War Two.

The design of Mason Temple is quite sophisticated, both from the point of styling and detail as well as from in complexity of its interior arrangement. While the structure is massive, there is little in the way of wasted space not dedicated to its use. While the most important function of the Temple was to house the annual National and International Convocations of the denomination in the Spring and Fall, the Temple also contained office space and meeting rooms that served double-duty for ongoing daily administrative activities. It is unfortunate that little information is available on the life and career of the building's architect, W. H. Taylor. Taylor was drawn to the project by way of his membership in the denomination, but it is not known where he may have lived and worked. He was not a Memphian according to city directories

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sources and directories published by the Memphis branch of the Negro Chamber of Commerce in the 1940s. Nonetheless, the design of Mason Temple itself demonstrates that Taylor possessed significant talent in the design of a complex, large-scale project; for this alone, his career deserves further study to offer proper recognition of this and other contributions to the built environment.

Six construction seasons passed before the dedication of Mason Temple as the World Headquarters of the Church of God in Christ. The Temple rose in increments, as reflected in the report of annual expenditures for its construction, beginning at \$23,751.51 in 1940 and ranging from a high of \$96,865.73 in 1945 to the low point of \$2,971.00 in 1944. The low figure for 1944 likely reflects the tremendous difficulty experienced by the denomination in receiving a priority from the U.S. government to allow the diversion of steel from the war effort to build the six massive equilateral trusses for the roof. The design of the trusses required the services of an engineer whose identity is unknown. However, the assistance of a qualified engineer may have been provided by Tri-State Iron Works, the firm that supplied all of the structural steel products for the building's construction. By early in 1945, COGIC was able to acquire the necessary clearances for its steel work, and the project was able to go forward to completion. The cost of the project, including seats and fixtures, was \$237,524.99. All costs of the construction project were paid by contributions raised by C. H. Mason; the building was completely free of debt from the start. Formal dedication of the Temple occurred on December 10, 1945, during the Thirty-Eighth Annual Convocation of COGIC. At this time, the Temple was declared "the largest convention hall owned by any negro church group in America" in dedication remarks by Bishop C. Range of Boston. The structure was named in honor of Bishop Mason as founder of the denomination.

In addition to the Temple itself, the construction of other parts of the existing complex included the construction of John Lee Hall in 1943-44 and the remodeling of Lela Mason Hall in 1944. Both structures were originally employed as dormitories to house members of the Saints who were unable to find or afford accommodations while attending the annual convocation at Memphis (Miller and Williams, pgs. 47-48).

Construction of the Mason Temple complex acted as something of a watershed for the COGIC denomination in its history. While COGIC was well-established as a significant religious movement within the African-American community by the 1940's, it is clear that the denomination enjoyed renewed vigor in expansion during the next three decades. The construction of this massive complex without debt provided a focus for the denomination-- a hub, if you will, one that remains with the denomination today.

It does appear that the establishment of a World Headquarters for COGIC had a dramatic effect on its growth. While historical statistics on

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clear that COGIC has out-paced the "established" African-American denominations (National Baptist Convention; African Methodist Church, Christian Methodist Church, etc.) in the same period. By contrast, "some black denominations have grown in membership, with the Church of God in Christ showing the most rapid growth from about 800 churches to over 10,000 since 1950" (Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 158). Estimates of membership in COGIC in 1989-1990 were placed at 3.7 million members, as opposed to the sum of the next twelve largest Holiness or Pentecostal denominations with a combined membership of 130,000 in the same year. By contrast, the National Baptist Convention, Inc. had a membership of 7.5 million; the National Baptist Convention of America, 2.4 million; the Progressive Baptist Convention, 1.2 million; the African Methodist Episcopal, 2.2 million; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church, 1.2 million; and, the Christian Methodist Episcopal, 0.975 million.

While COGIC was established in urban areas outside of the South by 1945, its growth as a truly national religious denomination has obviously occurred in much more significant numbers in the years since. The compilation of comparative historical data on membership and regional distribution of congregations during this period is not available from an imperial source, partly due to the abandonment of the decennial Census of Religious Bodies following the returns of 1936. For its own purposes, COGIC did not compile profiles of membership and regional distribution until the 1980s. Therefore, it is difficult to specifically identify the period when COGIC emerged as a truly national body following World War Two. Compilation of this information from various scholarly studies has proven to be unreliable, if not contradictory.

However, based on information for 1990 in COGIC files, the denomination currently has congregations established in forty-eight states of the Union, ranging from a single church in the State of Vermont to as many as 863 congregations in the State of Texas. Quite naturally, the distribution of congregations is concentrated in states and regions with large populations of African-Americans. By region, the states which make up the traditional members of the Southeast Region contain the largest number of congregations (2,803), while the states of the Northeast contain the least (114). However, distribution of congregations do reflect a much more national profile than may be indicated by regional statistics. For instance, the largest population of COGIC congregations in any state is Texas (863), followed by California (733). There are more congregations in Michigan (422) than in any Southeastern state with the exception of Texas. New York (362) and Illinois (362) have larger numbers of congregations than any of the original states which made up the COGIC base in 1907, namely Arkansas (201), Mississippi (282), Oklahoma (153), and Tennessee (210). Indeed, examination of the 1989-1990 COGIC International Directory shows that there are more COGIC congregations in Detroit alone (285) than in any of the original denominational states. Internationally, COGIC possesses active congregations in nineteen foreign countries on four

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Section number 8 Page # 7 Mason Temple, Church of God in Christ
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continents. International activity by COGIC appears most highly concentrated in South America and Africa.

Growth of the Church of God in Christ during the historic period of 1945-1968 also reflects on the maturity of the denomination as a major influence in the African-American community in the same period. The growth of the church during this period was led by the church's founding figure, Bishop Charles H. Mason, until his death on November 17, 1961 while visiting congregational leadership in Detroit.

Following the death of Bishop Mason, the denomination entered a period of great turmoil, largely as the result of an inadequate means of providing itself with a single leader as successor. Litigation between 1964 and 1968 was settled during a court-ordered constitutional convention, held on January 30, 1968. A formal constitution was accepted by the convention; the turmoil ended with general elections held later in the same year, resulting in the election of Bishop James O. Patterson, Sr. (1912-1989) as the Presiding Bishop for the denomination.

During the modern Civil Rights era of 1947 to 1968, COGIC played a major role through its individual congregations in various voter registration activities, desegregation boycotts and marches, though the specific contributions of congregations are not well-documented for COGIC or any African-American congregation. The fact that several COGIC churches were bombed during the desegregation movement in Mississippi stands as testimony enough to the contribution and sacrifice made by COGIC to the cause of racial equality (Lincoln and Mamiya, pg. 224).

Though COGIC's role in the Civil Rights Movement as a whole may have been extensive, the role of Mason Temple as a place of monumental importance to the history of the Movement will be forever linked to the Memphis Sanitation Worker's Strike of 1968, and the specific event as the place where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the famous "Mountaintop" speech on the evening of April 3, 1968. During the months of the strike in the early months of 1968, Mason Temple and Clayborn Temple (Former Second Presbyterian Church, NR 9/4/1979) at 280 Hernando Street alternated as centers for the organization of the strike. While many of the strike marches were led from Clayborn Temple, it was at Mason Temple that most of the large gatherings of the strikers met to rally support within the African-American community and in the members of the Anglo-American community who shared support for the sanitation workers attempts at unionization.

Following the bloody confrontation of marching strikers and police on March 28, 1968, a court injunction had held the marchers from making further public protest. Dr. King came to Memphis along with the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young and other staff members, to continue the momentum of the strike and to seek a means to overturn the court injunction against further protest. Planning for a non-violent protest march was to be planned at Mason Temple that evening, to be led by a

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speech from Reverend Abernathy (Abernathy, pg. 430-433). When Abernathy arrived to give his speech, he found a crowd of some 3,000 expecting to hear from Dr. King. Abernathy summoned Dr. King from his room at the Lorraine Motel (part of South Main Historic District, NR 9/2/82) to deliver the address.

In spite of the fact that King's address was unplanned, the speech, commonly known as "The Mountain Top" speech, is widely regarded as one of the most important pieces of oratory ever delivered in American history, perhaps second only to King's "I Have a Dream" speech in importance to the history of the Civil Right Movement as a whole.

The purpose of the Mountain Top speech was to rally the African-American community to join in another non-violent march to demand equal pay, improved working conditions and basic benefits for Memphis sanitation workers, the vast majority of whom were African-Americans. The extended strike had been stone-walled by the administration of Mayor Henry Loeb, without hope of compromise. Dr. King urged the unification of the African-American community through non-violent protest and economic boycott. In spite of this intent, it is the prophetic tone of the speech that continues to ring in our public conscience and consciousness to this day. King related the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan urging the African-American community to act for the good of all in spite of the consequences to individuals. Referencing threats made against his own life, King related that:

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has his place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

The impact of the Mountain Top speech was immediate, reported by electronic and print media around the world. The images of Dr. King during this address are indelibly etched into the collective memory of American history. But the passion generated by the address was turned to sorrow and anger within the next twenty-four hours with the reports of the assassination of Dr. King on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel on the afternoon of April 4, 1968. Apart from its significance in association with C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ, Mason Temple remains as a memorial to Dr. King, in character both haunting and celebratory.

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According to members of C.H. Mason's family, Mason's original church still survives, located on Dison Street in southeastern Memphis. Built in ca. 1898, it was this church that was reportedly the site of the 1907 split between Mason and C.P. Jones over the significance of glossolalia that broke the Holiness doctrine apart from what was to become COGIC. Most recently, the church was known as the "Fort Pickering COGIC"; it has been abandoned for a number of years. Vandalism and deterioration of the basic structure has rendered it of questionable integrity for listing upon the National Register.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Photographs

Mason Temple, Church of God in Christ
958 Mason Street
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee
Photographer: Gerald Smith
Date: June 28, 1991
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commisison

Photo 1 of 22

View of the front (western) facade of Mason Temple, facing east, from Mason Street.

Photo 2 of 22

View of the "old" Publishing House at left, Mason Temple at right, facing generally northeast from Mason Street.

Photo 3 of 22

Oblique view of the front (western) facade of Mason Temple and the side (southern) facade, facing generally north.

Photo 4 of 22

View of a part of the World Headquarters complex, with the rear of Mason Temple at far left, Lela Mason Hall at center left, the Bailey Guest House at center right, and John Lee Hall at extreme right, facing generally east.

Photo 5 of 22

View of John Lee Hall, with the Bailey Guest House at far left and the Bishop C. H. Mason House at far right, facing generally southeast.

Photo 6 of 22

View of Bishop C. H. Mason House with John Lee Hall at far left, looking generally east.

Photo 7 of 22

View of the World Headquarters complex from the rear (eastern) side of the property, facing generally northwest. The rear of the C. H. Mason House is shown at far left, with its garage at left center, John Lee Hall at center, and the Bailey Guest House at far right. The roof of Mason Temple is visible above and behind the Bailey Guest House.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Photo 8 of 22

Continuation of the previous view, facing generally northwest, with John Lee Hall at far left, the Bailey Guest House at left center, and Lela Mason Hall at right.

Photo 9 of 22

View of the entrance and foyer of Mason Temple, facing west towards Mason Street.

Photo 10 of 22

View of the stair core leading to the mezzanine level from the foyer in Mason Temple.

Photo 11 of 22

View of the northern corridor leading from the first floor foyer of Mason Temple containing the nursery and first aid center.

Photo 12 of 22

View of the southern corridor leading from the first floor foyer.

Photo 13 of 22

View of the interior of the former office suite of Bishop C. H. Mason, recently converted to house his tomb.

Photo 14 of 22

View of the foyer of the mezzanine level. Meeting rooms for the Women's Department of the denomination are contained in the rooms visible at right.

Photo 15 of 22

View of the stained glass window of Bishop Mason featured in the western wall of the second floor mezzanine.

Photo 16 of 22

View of the rostrum and choir area of Mason Temple, taken from the mezzanine.

Photo 17 of 22

View of the main seating area and mezzanine taken from the rostrum.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Photo 18 of 22

Panoramic view #1. View of the southern wing of the mezzanine from its extreme eastern corner, looking toward the rear of the auditorium.

Photo 19 of 22

Panoramic view #2. View of the mezzanine, main seating area and rostrum, from the extreme southeastern corner of the mezzanine.

Photo 20 of 22

Panoramic view #3. View of the rostrum and pulpit area, from the extreme southeastern corner of the mezzanine.

Photo 21 of 22

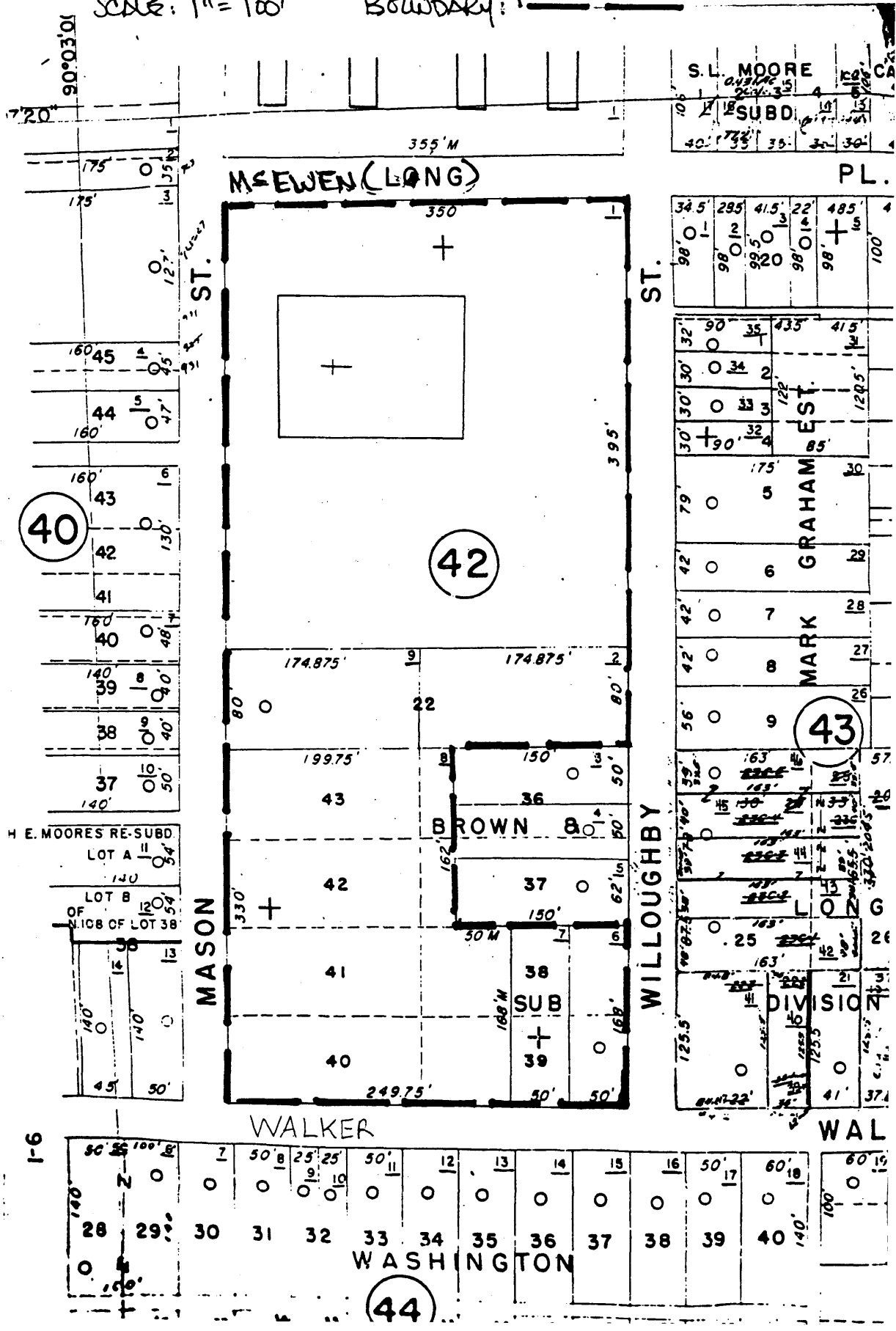
Panoramic view #4. View of the choir seating, balustrade and stair core servicing the choir area behind the rostrum, from the extreme southeastern corner of the mezzanine.

Photo 22 of 22

View of the cafeteria area of the basement level.

MASON TEMPLE, CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST
 958 MASON STREET
 MEMPHIS, SHELBY CO., TN
 PART, PROPERTY TAX MAP I-7

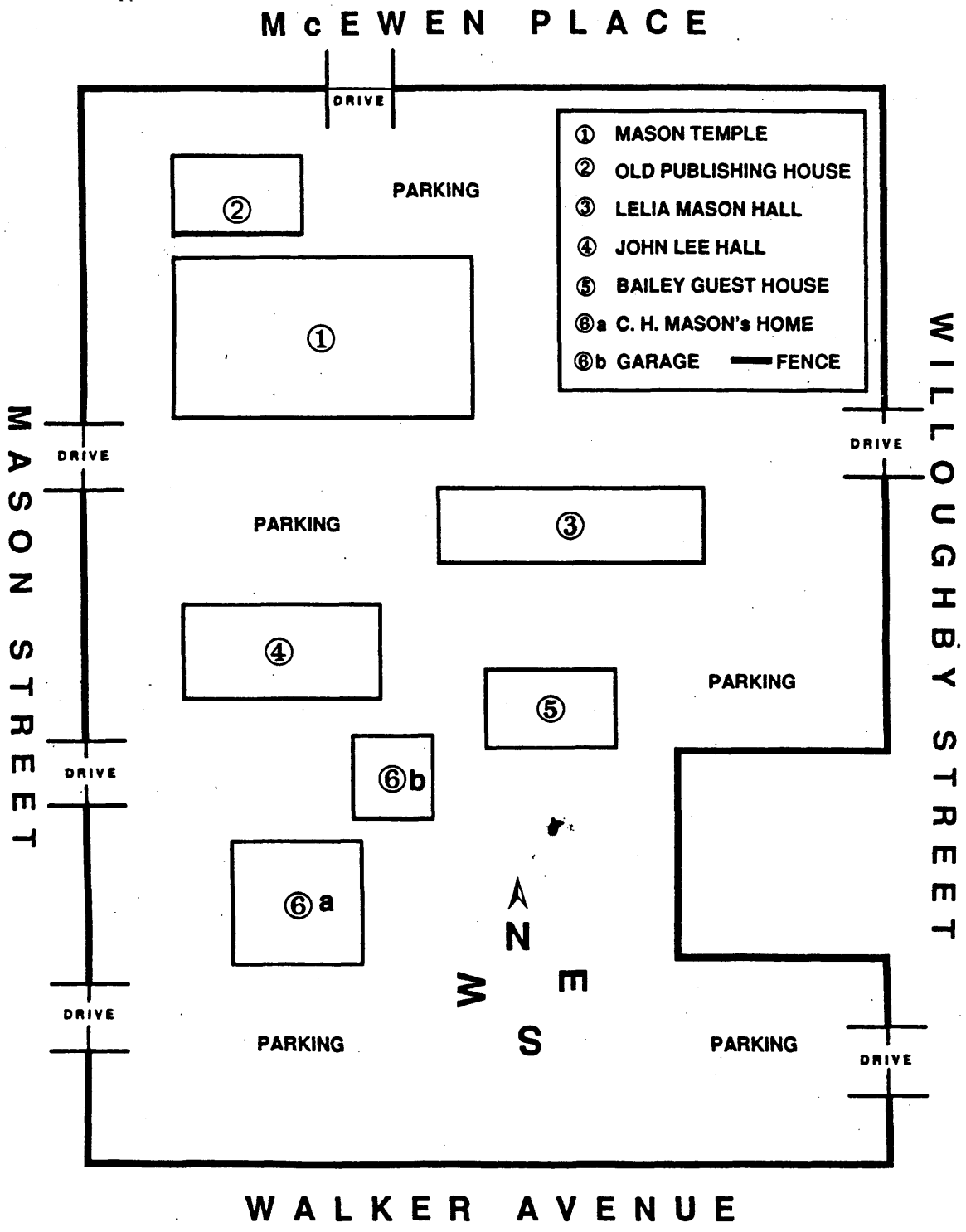
(MAP PROVIDED FOR OFFICIAL PROPERTY DIMENSIONS AND SURROUND
 PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER ONLY)
 SCALE: 1" = 100' BOUNDARY: _____



MASON TEMPLE, CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST
958 MASON ST.
MEMPHIS, SHELBY CO., TN

SCHEMATIC SITE PLAN
SCALE: 1" = 50' APPROX.
BOUNDARY: ———

NOTE: ALL PROPERTIES SHOWN CONTRIBUTE TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY IN NOMINATION



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PHOTO MAP KEY

▷ PHOTO LOCATION

