## 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.

__X__ **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.)

Property is:

__X__ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

____ B removed from its original location.

____ C a birthplace or a grave.

____ D a cemetery.

____ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

____ F a commemorative property.

____ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1939

Significant Dates 1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) _____

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Paul Revere Williams/Walker Boudwin

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See attached.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) See attached.

**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 # _____

**Primary location of additional data**

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository:_____

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property .56 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 11 | 257730 | 4378540 | 3 | __ | _____ | _____ |
| 2 | __ | _____ | _____ | 4 | __ | _____ | _____ |

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)
See Attached.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) See attached.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Mella Rothwell Harmon, Historic Preservation Specialist
organization State Historic Preservation Office date April 16, 1999
street & number 100 N. Stewart St. telephone (702) 687-7601
city or town Carson City state NV zip code 89701

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

name Reno-Sparks Theater Community Coalition
street & number 528 West First Street telephone 775-786-2278
city or town Reno state NV zip code 89503

## 7. Description

Reno's First Church of Christ, Scientist, now called the Lear Theater, sits on a triangular, one-half acre parcel that once housed the Odd Fellows' Royal D. Hartung Home for Orphans and Foundlings. The building faces Riverside Drive, which skirts the north bank of the Truckee River. The apex of the triangle is formed by Riverside Drive and West First Street, which passes behind the building. Passersby have an unobstructed view of all but the building's west elevation. Across the river is Newlands Bluff, so called for the prestigious and historic Newlands neighborhood that sits atop it. From the steps of the church one can see the backs of some of Reno's more impressive mansions. The area surrounding the church consists of a mix of land uses, but many homes and bungalows dating to the 1910s and 1920s still remain. To the east is Truckee River Park, which extends from Riverside Drive to the Arlington Street bridge. Modern intrusions near the church include the Greyhound Bus Depot at First and Stevenson Streets and the Truckee River Lodge on the corner of First and Ralston Streets. Until the 1970s, the neighborhood was primarily residential and from the 1920s to at least the 1950s many of the homeowners exploited Reno's famous divorce trade by operating boardinghouses for divorce-seekers who needed to establish a six-week residency.

The Christian Science church is a two story Neoclassical Revival style building of irregular cross plan, with single-story side and rear extensions, and raised above the surrounding landscape. The walls, chimney, and foundation are finished with a light gray stucco and trimmed in wood, although the building's original color was pale yellow with white trim (Palmer 1993:12). The roof is sheathed in composition shingles, and a masonry chimney extends from the east slope. The structure's interior framing is steel. Twin curving balustrades with cast-iron hand rails transition up to a raised terrace creating an elegant entrance to the church. Over-sized urns grace the ends of the balustrade. The style-defining entry portico fills the central third of the front elevation of the transept. This full-height porch is supported by four slender columns with subtle foliate capitals. Shadowing the columns and bracketing the three doorways, are four square pilasters with fluted capitals. The pediment over the portico is trimmed with dentils and a sunburst fanlight, with radiating molding within it. Dentils line the cornice, and the entabulature is plain. Between the four pilasters are three sets of paneled double doors trimmed with simple casings and crowns matching the entabulature of the building. In addition, a diagonal-patterned transom light is located above each door. The center set of doors is accentuated with a decorative pediment. On either side of the portico, within the lower half of the elevation, are one-over-one double-hung windows with diagonal-patterned grilles.

## 7. Description, continued

The gable ends of the transept are pedimented and duplicate the entabulature of the portico. At each corner are subtle pilasters rising through the relief of the cornice. The east elevation of the transept sports a tall fixed window in the upper half. This window is faced with diagonal-patterned grilles and a decorative cast-iron railing surrounds the lower quarter of the window. The window is capped with a scrolled open pediment with a finial projecting upwards from the center. Directly below this large window is a narrow fixed window with decorative grilles. In the narrow north-facing wall are two small, vertically-arranged windows, also with grilles. Projecting from the west elevation of the transept is a single-story extension with a shallow-pitched shed roof. Two double-hung windows with grilles pierce the walls of the south elevation. Two six-over-six double-hung windows are located on the west elevation of this extension, and three six-over-six windows are in the north wall. All of these windows are untrimmed.

The church's nave is oriented north-south. Midway along the east and west elevations of this wing are large tri-part windows. The two narrow outer panels are six-over-six double-hung and the larger center panel is twelve-over-twelve. The panels are separated and bracketed by pilasters with foliated capitals and topped with entabulature molding. Projecting to the west from the rear of the nave is a two-story, gable-roofed extension. Fenestration in this section is six-over-six double-hung sash windows of varying sizes, but two smaller windows are located on the south elevation. A fire escape is attached to an upstairs window on the west elevation. Also on the west elevation is an entry door, with two-over-three lights in the upper half of its surface. The door is bracketed by two two-over-two double-hung windows and is fronted by a small cement porch with a cast-iron railing. Along the east elevation of the nave there is a shallow, single-story shed-roofed extension containing a double door ornamented similarly to the main entry doors, with pilasters and transom, but with a flat cap. In front of the door is a cement ramp with cast-iron handrails that served as the side exit from the sanctuary.

The rear of the nave faces north. The gable end is ornamented only by eave returns, which drop into corner pilasters, and the boxed cornice. A circular grated vent is located in the wall just below the peak of the gable. Situated along the rear wall is a single-story, gable-roofed extension. The gable end is pedimented with subtle corner pilasters and a small round vent near the peak. Three untrimmed six-over-six double-hung windows pierce the rear wall. At the junction of this extension and the rear wall of the nave is a door, covered by a gabled porch with simple supports. The double door contains a transom of similar design to the other main doors in the building.

## 7. Description, continued

The building's interior was designed to seat approximately 600 and includes a basement, rooms for first and second readers, a reading room, a singer's room and organ chamber, an apartment for the building caretaker, and other quarters. The main entry hall, or narthex, has wood dado wainscoting, with painted plastered walls above. Stairs descending to the basement and ascending to the balcony are located in this area. The basement is semi-subterranean, with a dropped ceiling.

The main auditorium in the nave is entered through two doors leading from the narthex. The floor in the auditorium slopes downward to the north. The original seats are oak-backed, with hinged, padded seat cushions. A metal divider between the seats allows for individual seating, and a wire hat rack is located under each seat. The space originally seated 357. The walls in the nave are covered in wood dado paneling. Fluted pilasters with foliated capitals are placed along the tri-part windows in the west and east walls. The ceiling is plaster and vaults the main auditorium. The ceiling cornice has applied dentils. A Greek key fret and acanthus leaf motif is trompe l'oeil. The sloping floor of the main auditorium terminates at a platform area above a pair of risers. Directly in front of the platform is the organ pit. The balcony is reached by a staircase leading off the main hallway to the south. The balcony is cantilevered and has bottom chord bracing with metal lath and furring. There are 138 folding, bentwood seats in the balcony, each with a hat rack below, but without the upholstery of the seats below. There is a storage room off the balcony on the west side.

The Christian Science church is in excellent condition, and it retains a high degree of integrity. Since its acquisition by the Reno/Sparks Theater Community Coalition in April 1998, the building has been lovingly maintained, and the interior is in the process of conversion to a performing arts space that will retain the original layout and interior elements of the church. Integrity, as applied to properties eligible to the National Register, refers to the property's ability to convey its significance. Seven aspects of integrity must be considered, location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The First Church of Christ, Scientist building fully retains six of the seven aspects. Since the building is now experiencing adaptive reuse as a theater, it has lost its association with the religious activities for which it was originally intended. This is mitigated by the building's continued role in public service. When Reno's Christian Science congregation decided to build a new church, they chose a design that would reflect their doctrine of community service. In its current role, the building continues to serve the Reno community.

## 8. Significance

Reno's First Church of Christ, Scientist, built in 1939, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its distinctive Neoclassical Revival architectural style, designed by renown African-American architect Paul Revere Williams. The building must also be evaluated under Criteria Consideration A as a religious property. To be eligible for the National Register, a religious property must derive its primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction, or historical importance. The Christian Science church clearly meets these requirements, for its significance lies in the distinctive characteristics of its type, as well as for being the work of a master. Furthermore, the building is no longer owned by a religious organization, nor does it function as a religious property.

History of Reno

The land along the Truckee River was inhabited by Washoe and Paiute peoples when the first white men passed through in the 1840s. In the late 1840s and 1850s, thousands of emigrants crossed the Sierra Nevada to the gold fields of California. The travelers would remain a few days in the Truckee Meadows to allow their animals to feed on the native grasses. The first permanent white settlement along the Truckee River was Jamison's Station. Jamison was among the Mormon contingent sent by Brigham Young in 1855, to establish agricultural settlements in the western part of Utah Territory. Later, Young recalled his followers to Salt Lake City, and non-Mormons, or gentiles, took over the places established by the Mormons. Agriculture in the Truckee Meadows flourished as emigrants established ranches and stations along the travel routes to harvest native grasses for their animals as they made their way to the California Gold Rush (Angel 1881:623).

The lush fields of the Truckee Meadows offered excellent conditions for cattle and sheep grazing and the development of certain crops, and with the discovery of gold and silver on the Comstock, the number of settlers to the area increased. Reno was established with the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1868-1869. The 1872 construction of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, connecting Reno to Carson City and the Comstock, brought greater traffic. At first the little town was clustered around the railroad tracks and the Truckee River, consisting mostly of wood-framed structures with little architectural style or ornamentation. Agriculture thrived in the surrounding areas, especially with ready access to the railroad and the strong demand from booming mining districts. The state university was moved to Reno from Elko in 1885, establishing Reno as the state's educational center (Harmon 1999).

## 8. Significance, continued

Reno remained a relatively quiet place until the divorce trade, which began as early as 1900, developed into a thriving industry. Except for a two-year period, when the residency requirement was increased to one year (with noticeably disastrous economic effects), the waiting period for a Nevada divorce was six months. In 1927, during a period of competition among several states for the migratory divorce trade, the Nevada legislature shortened the residency period to three months. This act boosted the industry and divorce-seekers flocked to Reno. At the same time, Reno was the political center of the state. Figures such as Senator Francis Newlands, Senator George Nixon, and George Wingfield built mansions near the downtown core, through which the Truckee River runs. As the population grew, Reno gained political power that would not be eclipsed for half a century. In 1931, Nevada was beginning to feel the effects of the Great Depression. Mining was in a slump, and a devastating drought had seriously damaged crops, and sheep and cattle herds. Seeking a means to ameliorate the growing poverty in the State, the Nevada legislature revised its divorce law once again. This time, it shortened the residency requirement to six weeks and made the grounds for divorce more lenient. This act served to open the divorce flood gates. Over the ten years between 1929 and 1939, more than 30,000 divorces were granted by the Washoe County courts (Harmon 1998).

The legalization of gambling, also in 1931, created an industry that would grow to surpass the divorce trade. Hotels, clubs, and bars quickly added casinos. Soon Reno's downtown pulsed with neon lights and excited gamblers. By the 1940s, Virginia Street had become the main thoroughfare, serving as the center of activity from its crossing of the Truckee River to Ninth Street. The railroad, passing through the center of town, disembarked tourists daily, and the completion of U.S. 40, which traveled along Fourth Street, brought a steady stream of motorists through town (Harmon 1999).

During the Christian Science church's period of significance, Reno held an international reputation for its divorce trade, legalized gambling, and prostitution. During the 1930s, thousands of divorce-seekers flocked to Reno and the surrounding countryside, partaking of a certain high-life that was prevalent at the time. There was another Reno functioning during this time, however:

> . . . Reno is not merely a pleasure city: it is after all, a residence city, with thousands of modest, well-cared-for cottages; a city to which families with small children may come to live in beautiful, inspiring surroundings, with assurance that the little ones will have every

## 8. Significance, continued

> opportunity and good influence to become well-educated and self-reliant citizens. Reno probably has more church members in proportion to its population than any other city in the far west: a fact which, unfortunately, is not sufficiently sensational to be given headlines in newspapers (Siggers 1934:14).

First Church of Christ, Scientist

A wide variety of religions have been represented in Reno historically, including Christian Science. In a 1930 Nevada Religious Census, it was reported that of the statewide population of 91,000, 19,769 were church-goers. The majority of the latter number were Roman Catholic (8,447) and Latter-day Saints (4,889), but the report indicated a Christian Science congregation of 180 (WPA 1940:92). The first group of Christian Scientists to assemble in Nevada held its first meeting in the community of Elko, in northeastern Nevada. The group met in 1903 in a private home. Other Christian Science groups organized over the next few years: in Goldfield in 1905, Reno in 1906, Ely in 1907, and Carson City in 1911 (WPA 1940:92). The Reno group began with a membership of four individuals, who met in a private home. By the 1930s, the Reno Christian Scientists had their church and reading room at 210 Granite Street (now Sierra Street), but membership was growing and the group was ready for a larger church.

Using loans, proceeds from the sale of the Granite Street property, and gifts from benefactors, the congregation purchased the parcel at 501 Riverside Drive and prepared to build their new church. Mrs. Luella Garvey, a wealthy transplant from Los Angeles, had brought architect Paul Williams to Reno in 1933 to design her elegant duplex home on California Avenue. For unknown reasons, Mrs. Garvey (who was not a member of the Christian Science church) wanted to contribute to a church construction project. One local denomination turned down her offer, but the Christian Scientists accepted (Warnock 1999). Through Mrs. Garvey, Williams was approached for the job of designing the new church. The Christian Scientists were pleased with the plans Paul Williams created for their church: a traditional monumental design in the Neoclassical style, one with which Paul Williams was particularly familiar (Wesley Henderson, personal communication, March 24, 1999). Reno builder, Walker Boudwin, was hired to construct the building according to Williams' design. The

## 8. Significance, continued

relationship between architect and builder must have been satisfactory, because Boudwin constructed several other Reno buildings designed by Paul Williams during this decade (Palmer 1993). It is not known how much money Mrs. Garvey gave for the church project , as many of the church's records were destroyed in the flood of 1950. The Truckee River, directly across the street from the church, overflowed its banks flooding the Sunday School in the basement, and rising to the auditorium, ruining the organ.

Master Architect Paul Revere Williams

Paul Revere Williams was not only a popular and prolific architect, he was also a remarkable person. African-American Paul Williams was born in Los Angeles in 1894, and orphaned at the age of four. He grew up in a neighborhood that was generally racially integrated, but by the time Williams reached high school, he began to feel the sting of prejudice. While a student at Los Angeles Polytechnic High School, Williams developed his artistic abilities and studied architecture.

The turning point in Paul Williams' life came when he announced to a design instructor his interest in pursuing a career in architecture. Astonished, the instructor declared, "Who ever heard of a Negro being an architect? You have the ability—but use it some other way. Don't butt your head futilely against the stone wall of prejudice" (Williams 1937:161). Williams encountered difficulties on his road to success and acceptance. He passed through "successive stages of bewilderment, inarticulate protest, resentment, and finally reconciliation to the status of my race" (Williams 1937:161). Williams eventually changed his view on his condition and saw it as an incentive to personal accomplishment, "an inspiring challenge." (Williams 1937:161). Williams became determined to vindicate every ability he had and to acquire new ones. He wanted to prove that he, "as an individual, deserved a place in the world" (Williams 1937:161).

To further broaden his artistic abilities, in 1912 Williams enrolled in the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, a New York institution with an atelier in Los Angeles. It was there that Williams was introduced to the architecture of Europe, which would greatly influence his later work, including the design for Reno's First Church of Christ, Scientist. Williams excelled at the Institute, winning the coveted Beaux-Arts medal after three years of study. His success reinforced his belief that he could

## 8. Significance, continued

compete on his own merit. Over the next few years, young Paul Williams won several other design awards in national competitions including first prize in a civic center design competition for the City of Pasadena, first honorable mention in architecture at the Chicago Emancipation Celebration in 1915, and third place for the Sperling Prize (Hudson 1993:11-13).

In 1913, Williams went to work for landscape architect Wilbur D. Cook, where he learned town planning and integrating garden design with architecture. Williams realized while under Cook's tutelage that he needed to have broader knowledge beyond mere design in order to be a successful architect. As a result, he enrolled in a course of architectural engineering at the University of Southern California. He also attended three different art schools for intensive study in design, color harmony, and rendering. In 1915, California certified Williams as an architect (Hudson 1993).

From Cook's practice, Williams went to work for Reginald D. Johnson, where he honed his skills in residential design. Between 1920 to 1922, Williams worked for the firm of John C. Austin's. During this time, he worked on more than 30 school designs, and assisted in the preparation of construction drawings for the Shrine Civic Auditorium, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and the First Methodist Church in Los Angeles. Williams continued to enter design competitions and over this period he won three consecutive competitions for small house designs, establishing himself as a small-house specialist. This nascent reputation became the foundation for Williams' own practice.

Louis Cass, a former classmate of Williams', had heard about his success and came to him with a commission to design a home in the affluent Los Angeles community of Flintridge. This allowed Williams to open his own office in the Stock Exchange Building in downtown Los Angeles. By 1929, Williams had moved from being a small-house specialist to designing large estates. In 1931, he received a commission from automobile magnate E.L. Cord, to design a $300,000, 32,000-square-foot home in Beverly Hills. The Cord estate became a standing advertisement for Williams' work.

While the nation suffered through a serious depression during the 1930s, Williams' architectural practiced flourished. This was due in part to the fact that Williams' work was embraced by the Hollywood movie scene, and film stars, directors, and producers sought him out. He was in such demand that he became known as "the architect to the stars" (Hudson 1993). Paul Williams did not cater solely to the rich and famous, however. He was an associate architect with the Federal Negro

## 8. Significance, continued

Housing Project in the late 1930s, and maintained an office in Washington D.C., as well as his private practice in Los Angeles (Williams 1937). In 1936, presumably in association with the Federal Negro Housing Project, Williams collaborated with another noted black architect, Hilyard Robinson, on the federally-funded, 200-unit Langston Terrace Housing Project in Washington, D.C. Langston Terrace still stands today and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987 (National Park Service 1999).

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal public housing projects led directly to defense housing ventures as America geared up for World War II. Built in 1940, Pueblo del Rio was a federally-funded, 400-unit housing project in Southeast Los Angeles that was open to African-American residents. The project was a joint venture, which included such notable architects as Adrian Wilson, Gordon Kaufman, Becket and Wurdeman, and Richard Neutra. Paul Williams was appointed chief architect for the project (Gebhard 1993). In 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which outlawed segregationist hiring practices by defense-related industries holding federal contracts. In 1942, Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI) built a plant in what became Henderson, Nevada, and imported a crew of 13,000 workers, 3,000 of whom were African-American laborers from Arkansas and Louisiana. To house its employees, BMI built two housing developments, Victory Village and Carver Park. Carver Park was specifically built for the African-American workers and their families. The complex consisted of 324 units and a dormitory. Carver Park was designed by Paul Williams and constructed by Hammes-Euclemiler Company of Los Angeles. Other defense housing projects followed for Williams, primarily in the West, and during the war years he served as an architect for the U.S. Navy (Kimball and Blair 1991).

During and after World War II, Williams continued in his role as premier architect of individual residences, mostly in southern California. His reputation was made not only in residential architecture, however. Williams won commissions to design numerous and varied commercial buildings, school buildings (a number of which were located on the campuses of historically black universities), churches, hospitals, hotels and motels, and restaurants. Williams, both the man and the architect, won many awards and accolades through the years. In addition to four honorary doctoral degrees, he won numerous awards for architecture. In 1923, Williams became the first African-American to become a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and in 1957

## 8. Significance, continued

he was elected to the AIA College of Fellows, the first African-American to be so honored. In 1953, he was awarded the Springarn Medal by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Paul Williams retired from his architectural practice in 1973 and died in Los Angeles on January 23, 1980 (Hudson 1993).

Paul Williams' Stylistic Development

When Paul Williams entered the architectural field early in the second decade of the twentieth century, southern California was nearing the end of its Craftsman phase. Craftsman principles were incorporated into a variety of designs, including English forms and Hispanic-Mediterranean styles. As Williams developed his early reputation as a designer of small houses, he tended to prefer Spanish colonial designs. This style easily and effectively integrated formal gardens, a design element Williams learned to employ while working for planner and landscape architect, Wilbur D. Cook. When Williams struck out on his own in 1922, one of his first commissions was an English Tudor style residence rendered in stucco and half-timbering. As Williams' practice developed toward the middle of the decade, he favored the picturesque English styles, and his designs were called, "lively and openly romantic" (Gebhard 1993:21). He nevertheless continued designing Spanish colonial revival houses throughout the decade (Gebhard 1993).

By 1930, what David Gebhard (1993) described as "East Coast Colonial" styles began to supersede the Hispanic forms in California. Williams' commission for E.L. Cord was described as a "Southern Colonial design," in which "the colonial image was carefully abstracted, in order to be simultaneously traditional and modern" (Gebhard 1993:22). Gebhard (1993:23) further describes the Cord house as, "In contrast to the reductive simplicity of the exterior, the interiors are almost archaeologically correct in their use of Georgian and French details." During the 1930s, the vast majority of Williams' residential commissions were in the Georgian or Regency styles, and although he favored classical forms, he softened the symmetry with non-formal elements, and his use of historical styles always had a modernist flavor (Gebhard 1993:24).

Williams was also able to work in a fully modern idiom. In 1936, Williams designed two houses for the California House and Garden Exhibit. One was a French cottage, which was really in the Regency style, and a three-room "Steel House." The steel house was what would become the California Ranch style and it employed modern materials in such a way as to look traditional. From

## 8. Significance, continued

a distance, the steel walls looked like wood, and the interior wall treatment suggested painted wood paneling (Gebhard 1993). Williams' experience with experimental construction using modern materials no doubt recommended him for the 15-unit El Reno project, completed in 1939.

Williams' greatest successes during the 1930s drew on the classical styles. His most widely publicized (and award-winning) non-residential commissions of the decade were the Music Corporation of America's Beverly Hills building (1936), and the Saks Fifth Avenue store, also in Beverly Hills (1939). The Music Corporation of America building resembled an elegant Georgian country house with white-painted brick walls, the two-story columned entrance, and the central cupola. The Saks store united the traditional Regency style with elements of Streamline Moderne (Gebhard 1993:25). Williams was a master of portraying the building's purpose in its style and for fitting the building in its setting. It was during this phase of Paul Williams' design development that he rendered the Christian Science church in Neoclassical elegance, but at a scale that complemented the towering cottonwood trees that lined the Truckee River and asserted itself, but did not dominate, its location in the Biggest Little City in the World.

During World War II, Williams' commissions dropped off, no doubt as a result of his active participation in a variety of defense-housing projects. After the war, however, Williams' designs changed from the classical and traditional to modern, contemporary ranch styles, although he tended to retain Regency tastes in the interiors or display the classical tradition in elements such as delicate fenestration, symmetry, and proportions. Even though Williams was sensitive to changes in architectural fashion, he would draw on historical styles, transforming them with a sense of modernity (Gebhard 1993).

The architectural style of Reno's First Church of Christ, Scientist has been described as Neoclassical and "Colonial Revival with Regency influences" (Historic Environment Consultants 1982). It is not known how Paul Williams classified his building, but clearly the Regency influence is his signature. For the purposes of this nomination, the building is being identified as Neoclassical Revival. This allows for the monumental full-height porch and the eclectic mix of architectural details, including Regency styling. Neoclassical was a dominant style for domestic buildings nation-wide during the first half of the twentieth century. The style traces its roots to the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago. The event had a classical theme and dramatic, colonnaded buildings were constructed around a central court. The exposition was widely attended and was the subject of

## 8. Significance, continued

numerous photographs and reports. Soon the Neoclassical style was all the fashion for residential and commercial buildings (McAlester and McAlester 1990).

Williams' work has also been described as following the Regency style. This style was particularly popular during the 1930s and was loosely based on the English Neoclassical style common during the regency of George IV (1811-1830). The principal attributes of the style were plain façades with quoins at the corners and main entrance, hipped roofs, a flat-roofed entry, and the use of decorative cast-iron scrollwork (Bucher 1996:378). What is called Regency is also similar to the Adam style, which is characterized by "clarity of form, use of color, subtle detailing, and unified schemes of interior design" (Harris 1977). The significance of the Regency and Adam styles to the Christian Science church is three-fold. They were both detail oriented, influential in the USA, and neoclassical (so ripe for integrating into Neoclassical Revival forms). Williams' employees reported that he particularly liked designing details. The delicate detailing of the Regency and Adam styles allow for creative adjustment of proportions, and this may have appealed to Williams (Wesley Henderson, personal communication, May 3, 1999). The caption under the drawing of the Christian Science church in *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (Hudson 1993) explains Williams' facility with the Neoclassical style: "This church exemplifies Williams' ability to adapt residential design to commercial projects as well as his desire to create pleasing, calming environments." This, indeed, is what he created at 501 Riverside Drive, along the Truckee River, among the cottonwood trees.

Paul Williams' Nevada Commissions

There are currently 15 known Paul Williams commissions completed in Nevada between 1933 and 1963, although there is likely to be more that remain unsubstantiated. Of Williams' known works, five were in Reno. It is not known whether the Garvey House, in town on upscale California Avenue, or the Rafael Herman House,[1] at Rancho San Rafael, was the first of Williams' Nevada commissions. It is likely that both Luella Garvey and the Herman brothers knew of Williams

[1] Karen Hudson's 1993 book, *A Legacy of Style*, lists two specific Reno commissions, the N.B. Herman Residence (1936) and the Rafael Norman House (n.d.). Research has revealed that this is one and the same house. Norman Herman was Rafael Herman's brother and together they were part owners of Rancho San Rafael, in northwest Reno. According to Norman Herman's widow, Paul Williams was hired to design the main ranch house in 1933 (Rusco 1998; Polk 1933, 1938).

## 8. Significance, continued

through their associations with southern California. Although no direct association with E.L. Cord could be found, Garvey and the Hermans probably had knowledge of Cord's Paul Williams'-designed home in Beverly Hills, as well.

The Garvey House is an unusual architectural design for 1930s Reno. The one- and two-story, L-shaped duplex reflects French architectural influences, with balconies with ornamental iron railings and Regency-style windows with iron grilles. The house has been described as reflecting "the occasionally flamboyant Regency styles of Los Angeles" (Historic Environment Consultants 1992). Mrs. Garvey lived in one half of the duplex and rented the other half to her attorney, Edward Lunsford. The ranch house at Rancho San Rafael was built for Dr. Rafael Herman and his brother Norman, who ran cattle on the property and visited infrequently from their permanent homes in Los Angeles (Rusco 1998). Stylistically, the house, with eighteen rooms and a full basement, most closely fits the "Minimal Traditional" style described by J.M. Baker (1994:148), although there are hints of French and Craftsman details. The ranch house is also L-shaped, forming a patio entered through two pergolas. The contractor on the project was Walker Boudwin, who constructed the Christian Science church six years later. Rancho San Rafael was acquired by Washoe County for a park in the 1980s. The ranch house is currently used as a meeting house and wedding location (Rusco 1998).

In addition to the Christian Science church, Williams completed two other projects in Reno in 1939. Whereas the 1933 projects and the church reflect Williams' facility with classical styles, the two 1939 projects demonstrated that Williams was proficient with modern forms. Loomis Manor is located several blocks west of the church and was built for Anna Loomis, a member of the church and a Christian Science practitioner. The apartment building, originally painted a stark white, is a U-shaped, Art Moderne complex, with smooth stuccoed walls, string courses emphasizing horizontality, and steel-framed casement windows wrapping around the building's sharp corners. Sitting across the street from the Truckee River, amidst towering cottonwood trees, Loomis Manor remains today a treasure of Reno's historic architecture (Palmer 1993).

The 15 housing units of the El Reno project displayed modern materials as well as modern design. The El Reno housing project was built by Roland Giroux at the corner of Mount Rose Street and South Virginia Street in Reno. Roland Giroux was a wealthy developer from southern California and no doubt knew Williams, or knew of him, from Williams' successes there. The El Reno project

## 8. Significance, continued

was built to exploit Reno's economic boom resulting from its world-renown divorce trade. The project consisted of 15 "apartment homes," constructed of state-of-the-art materials and methods. They were steel framed, and the interior walls were insulated with fabric-covered panels that fit into channels and could be removed. Each unit was heated with radiant heat and the electrical wiring was enclosed in conduit. Only one El Reno unit remains in its original location, but beginning in the 1950s, when the divorce trade began to slow, the others were moved around town. Most remain extant, however, as a testament to their design and construction (Spencer Hobson, personal communication, December 1998, Carson City).

There are two residential structures in Reno attributed by some to Williams. One dates to the 1940s and the other to the early 1960s. Both are of a similar style to the Garvey House, with decorative ironwork and a French flavor, but Williams' association has yet to be substantiated. Unfortunately, many of Paul Williams' records were lost and/or destroyed while in storage during World War II and later during the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992 (Hudson 1993).

During the 1940s, Williams' Nevada projects included a ranch for E.L. Cord in rural Esmeralda County, and the 498-unit Carver Park housing development, built to house African-American workers at the BMI plant in Henderson, in southern Nevada. Unfortunately, nothing has been recorded on the E.L. Cord ranch, reported to have been located near Silver Peak. It is known, however, that Cord died on his ranch in 1974. Carver Park was a complex of single-story, flat-roofed structures, consisting of 64 dormitory units, 104 one-bedroom units, 104 two-bedroom units, and 52 three-bedroom units. All had modern kitchens, swamp coolers, running hot and cold water, and on-site laundry facilities. Carver Park was demolished in the 1970s (Kimball and Blair 1991).

In her 1993 book, William's granddaughter, Karen Hudson, provided a selected list of his commissions. From that source, seven Paul Williams projects were identified in Las Vegas, Nevada during the 1950s and 1960s. With the exception of the La Concha Motel, built in the 1950s, locating these properties has been largely unsuccessful. According to architectural historian, Wesley Henderson, who researched Paul Williams' career for his Ph.D. dissertation, the Las Vegas properties have fallen into obscurity and may all have been demolished by this time (personal communication, March 24, 1999, via e-mail). The following is the list of Williams' Nevada commissions from Karen Hudson's 1993 book:

## 8. Significance, continued

Paul Revere Williams Nevada Commissions (from Hudson 1993)

1933 Garvey House, 589 California Avenue, Reno
1933 Rafael Herman House, Rancho San Rafael Park, Reno
1939 Loomis Apartments, 1045 Riverside Drive, Reno
1939 First Church of Christ, Scientist, Reno
1939 El Reno Housing Project (15 houses) South Virginia Street at Mount Rose Street, Reno
1940 Circle L Ranch, Fish Lake, Nevada
1940 E.L. Cord Ranch, Silver Peak, Nevada (this may be the same as the Circle L Ranch)
1942 Carver Park (498 units), Basic Townsite (Henderson)
1950s La Concha Motel, Las Vegas
1951 O.H. Nelson Residence, Las Vegas
1957 Las Vegas Hotel Casino and Shopping Center, Las Vegas
1957 Stalcup Shopping Center, Las Vegas
1959 Flamingo Hotel (alterations and additions), Las Vegas
1963 St. Viator's Church and Parish School, Las Vegas
n.d. Frederick Leistikow Residence, Las Vegas

Summary

The First Church of Christ, Scientist building in Reno, Nevada fulfills the requirements for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural style, as the work of a master, and for its high artistic value. The building is a prime example of the Neoclassical Revival style and demonstrates the signature Regency elements of its designer, Paul Williams. Within its setting along the Truckee River, the elegant building represents the pinnacle of architectural art in the city. When the Christian Science congregation sold their beautiful building to the Reno/Sparks Theater Community Coalition in 1998, they chose buyers who would preserve the building and continue it in public service. In one year, the Theater Coalition has done a remarkable job of maintaining the building and adapting it to use as a theater. The building, which was listed in the Nevada State Register of Historic Places in 1982, is ripe for the recognition National Register listing will bring.

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## 10. Geographical Data

### Verbal Boundary Description

Assessor's Parcel Number 11-096-01. USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle, *Reno, Nev.*, 1967, photorevised 1982. Section 11, T.19N, R.19E, Mt. Diablo Meridian.

### Boundary Justification

The resource boundary includes all that land commonly associated with the .56-acre lot APN 11-096-01.

## Photographs

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| Name of Property: | First Church of Christ, Scientist |
| Location of Property: | 501 Riverside Drive<br>Reno, Washoe County, Nevada |
| Location of Negatives: | State Historic Preservation Office<br>100 N. Stewart Street<br>Carson City, NV 89701 |
| Name of Photographer: | Mella Rothwell Harmon |
| Date of Photographs: | April 29, 1999 |
| Photograph 1: | First Church of Christ, Scientist (now the Lear Theater)<br>South (front) elevation, facing northwest |
| Photograph 2: | First Church of Christ, Scientist<br>East elevation, facing west |
| Photograph 3: | First Church of Christ, Scientist<br>North (rear) elevation, facing south |
| Photograph 4: | First Church of Christ, Scientist<br>West elevation, facing northeast |