

First Church of Christ, Scientist, Fullerton

142 E. Chapman Avenue

1920

Spanish Colonial Revival

Status: Significant Property



Soon after dedicating its Mother Church in Boston in 1894, the Christian Science Church began an expansive building program, and by the 1930s, every major city in the nation had one of the new denomination's churches. Most of the churches were built in the classical revival styles, but California architects – Elmer Grey, Irving Gill, Bernard Maybeck – argued for a more indigenous and local architectural style. Concurring, Los Angeles architect George A. Howard, Jr. would design the Fullerton Christian Scientist Church in a Spanish Colonial Revival style. A devout Christian Scientist, who would rise to the rank of first reader, Howard designed reading rooms and churches until his death in 1957, at the age of 84, including edifices in Alhambra, Arcadia, Eagle Rock, Los Angeles, Pasadena, San Pedro, and Santa Ana.

The interior features the “auditorium sanctuary” plan preferred by Christian Science congregants. Derived from theater design, the church sanctuary has a bowl type layout of seats on a floor sloping down to a raised stage or speaker platform, a plan preferred by parishioners valuing the spoken word over liturgy and ceremony in their services. A derivation of the Akron Plan – borrowed from the nearby First Methodist Episcopal Church at 110 N. Pomona Avenue – can also be seen in a room attached to the sanctuary auditorium, separated by a movable wall, which increases the size of the sanctuary on special occasions. The auditorium plan – the first in Fullerton – fits well with the corner site, showcasing the building's dramatic Churrigueresque features on the front façade. The wings of the building seem to embrace the corner, providing a warm reception to all whom wish to visit the site.

The church was constructed in 1920, but not dedicated until November 1929, when the \$35,000 debt had been paid. In 1967, the building became the property of the Self-Realization Fellowship, an international nonprofit spiritual organization founded in 1920 by Paramahansa Yogananda. The SRF continues to own the property and conduct meditation sessions and other services there.