In 1973, Zen in the United States remained a fledgling religious movement, characterized by small, informal meditation groups meeting in living rooms and rented spaces across the country. Only a handful of large practice centers existed in major metropolitan areas, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Few American practitioners enjoyed any access to an authorized Zen teacher. In retrospect, however, the Zen movement of 1973 appears poised on the verge of dramatic change, situated at the beginning of what would prove to be four decades of rapid growth and development. This presentation introduces a long-term project mapping the spread of Zen over the forty-year period between 1973 and 2014. Inspired by a manuscript discovered in the Aitken Archive that documented the variety of Zen practice groups of the time, the project analyzes the original 47 groups, traces them down to the present, and maps out the emergence of hundreds of other Zen groups across the decades.

The presentation will set out the findings for the first stages of the project. The project includes the creation of interactive maps, using GIS mapping software, as well as more typical analysis of research data to be published in scholarly journals. The mapping portion of the project includes an interactive story map of the original Zen sites identified in 1973 and interactive maps documenting the rapid spread of Zen centers, based on data sets from 1973, 1988, 1998 to 2014. In addition to sharing current versions of these geographic media, the presentation will also review the initial findings regarding the patterns of Zen practice typical of 1973.