

OKLAHOMA CITY CIVIC CENTER

Bounded by N. Shartel Avenue to the West, N. Hudson Avenue to the East, Couch Drive to the North, and Colcord Drive to the South

Oklahoma City

Oklahoma

Oklahoma

HALS OK-9

OK-9

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

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1849 C Street NW

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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

OKLAHOMA CITY CIVIC CENTER

HALS NO. OK-9

- Location:** Bounded by N. Shartel Avenue to the West, N. Hudson Avenue to the East, Couch Drive to the North and Colcord Drive to the South., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma
Lat: 35.4922 Long: -97.52246
- Significance:** The plan for the Civic Center Complex was included in the first and last completed comprehensive city plan for Oklahoma City that was influenced by the City Beautiful Movement. The plan, created by the landscape architecture firm Hare and Hare of Kansas City, Missouri in 1930, was implemented during the years of the Great Depression and relied upon several New Deal programs for funding and labor. Among the new deal programs that aided in the site construction were the Public Work's Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Works Project Administration. After its completion, the Civic Center served as an important cultural destination for Oklahoma City residents; the same remains true today.
- History:** City Beautiful Movement
The development of the Oklahoma City Civic Center grew out of the City Beautiful Movement, a trend that swept the nation at the turn of the 20th Century. The movement sought to improve the appearance of cities throughout the country by creating, transforming, and upgrading public spaces into beautiful, well-organized, and appealing destinations. One immensely important aspect of the City Beautiful Movement as it pertains to Oklahoma City was the conceptualization and implementation of grand civic designs. The civic center scheme as it applies to a formal ensemble of public buildings in 1902 by John De Witt Warner, a leader of New York City's Municipal Art Society.
- Beginnings of the OKC Civic Center Complex
The City Beautiful Movement spread to Oklahoma as early as 1903, when a City Beautiful organization formed in Oklahoma City. In 1909, W. H. Dunn, Superintendent of Parks in Kansas City, Missouri, was hired to design a parks and boulevard plan for the city. This plan was not completely implemented, due to insufficient monetary resources. Nevertheless, in 1920, the city acquired the services of the noted City Beautiful planner and consultant George E. Kessler of St. Louis, Missouri. He was to complete a comprehensive plan to ensure the city's planned development as it grew. Kessler, however, died three years later in 1923, leaving his plan unfinished. Undeterred by these early obstacles, city commissioners charged forward, and, in 1928, they brought in the landscape architecture and city planning firm of Hare and Hare out of Kansas City, Missouri.

Civic Center Development under Hare and Hare

The father-son landscape architecture firm Hare and Hare established themselves as successful city planners in the Southwest prior to their time in Oklahoma City and came highly recommended. Their primary task was to complete the unfinished Kessler Plan. On December 24, 1930, two years after being hired by the city, Hare and Hare formally submitted their completed comprehensive plan (dated 1929) to the Oklahoma City Planning Commission. It was the first fully completed comprehensive plan for the city.

The Civic Center Complex was largely influenced by other City Beautiful designs. For example, the original design for City Hall was based upon the recently finished City Hall in Los Angeles, California. The conceptual design consisted of the Municipal Auditorium (Civic Center Music Hall), Municipal Building, City Jail and Police Headquarters, and the Oklahoma County Courthouse. In addition to these grand buildings, the plan also proposed meticulously designed landscapes and streets throughout the complex to add to the site's visual appeal and to improve the circulation to and around the buildings.

As outlined by Hare and Hare, there were certain essentials required for a successful civic center. First, it needed to be located adjacent to the retail business district, and "close to the general trend of growth of the business district." Second, careful consideration needed to assure the civic center did not form a barrier or impede the growth of the expanding commercial developments. According to Hare and Hare, the location in Oklahoma City satisfied these requirements.

Funding and Construction

Construction on the project was postponed until 1935 because of the economic downturn that followed the stock market crash of October 29, 1929. The Public Works Administration, created in 1933, provided billions of dollars to fund public works projects across the country, including money for Oklahoma City's Civic Center. Thus, in the years following the creation of this New Deal program, parts of Hare and Hare's plans for the Civic Center Complex were finally funded, with \$1,462,500 coming from the PWA and the remaining \$1,787,500 from a city bond issue. Construction of the site ultimately involved other government agencies including the Civil Works Administration and the Works Project Administration. By 1936, the basic site design was implemented, and by March, 1937, all of the buildings were finished and in use.

Modifications and Redesigns

Although the buildings within the Civic Center Complex have received interior and exterior renovations over the years, the original civic structures remain. The landscape of the civic area in downtown Oklahoma City has experienced various modifications as plant materials were replaced or removed completely,

monuments were built, and streets were widened to accommodate additional vehicular traffic around the site and to the business district. As recently as 2001, the landscape architecture firm Howard-Fairbairn, redesigned the site. Included in this report are the original 1929 Hare and Hare plans, the 1936 implemented design, the result of Howard-Fairbairn's redesign, and the current (2008 as built) layout of the site.

- Sources: Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 151, 157, & 376.
- Cynthia Savage, "City Beautiful Movement," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia> (accessed October 28, 2007).
- "Planning History," City of Oklahoma City, <http://www.okc.gov/planning/history/index.html> (accessed October 28, 2007).
- Hare and Hare City Planning Consultants, *Report of the City Planning Commission Oklahoma City, Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City, OK: City Planning Commission, 1931), 47-49
- Historic American Buildings Survey, *Municipal Building, 200 North Walker, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, OK* (Oklahoma City, OK: Community Development Department, 1981).

Supplemental

- Material: Oklahoma City Civic Center Site Plans prepared by Oklahoma State University, Landscape Architecture, Program LA 4990 Historic Cultural Landscapes, Study Team: Randy Becker, Andrew Loverude, Justin Kissman, Stephen Murphy, and Steve Eilers with Instructor Dr. Charles Leider during the Fall 2008 semester.
- Sheets 1-3 include historic images for which copyright could not be released and are located within the field notes of this collection.
- Sheets 4-10 include copyright release forms and are publicly accessible within this collection.

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View of front of Civic Center Music Hall (Steve Eilers, 2008).



View of Bicentennial Plaza with Municipal Building in the background (Steve Eilers, 2008).

ADDENDUM TO:

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