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San Antonio City Hall
Military Plaza
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-222

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

P. O. BOX 9066

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78285

Name: San Antonio City Hall

Location: Military Plaza, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Present Owner: City of San Antonio

Present Occupant and Use: Principal offices for the Municipal government of the City of San Antonio.

Significance: San Antonio City Hall is situated in the center of Military Plaza (Plaza de Armas) established in 1722 by the Spanish settlers of Texas who earlier had established a garrison on San Pedro Creek which runs along the western border of the plaza.

The plaza has had a long history as the seat of government. Moses Austin came here in 1820 seeking permission from the Spanish governor to settle Anglo-American colonists in Texas.

Construction of the present City Hall in the center of the plaza in 1888-91 put an end to the open air market, the "Chili Queens" and the rowdy activities of the cowboys, cattlemen and gamblers who frequented the plaza outside the early Old Spanish Governor's Palace and "Eat Cave" jailhouse.

The Italian Renaissance Revival style building, designed by a prominent architect known for his work in New York, Chicago and St. Louis changed the character of Military Plaza from an open market area to the center of municipal government.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical history

1. Contract to construct San Antonio City Hall was awarded by City Council August, 1888. (Copy of City Council Minutes is attached).

Part of funding for construction was provided by citizens who pledged various sums in support of the project.

Cornerstone of the 'new' City Hall was laid September 16, 1889.

2. Architect: Otto Kramer of St. Louis who was well known for his designs in New York, Chicago and throughout the mid-west. The

only other known example of his work in San Antonio is a mausoleum in the old Oddfellows Cemetary. (City Council Minutes).

3. Contractor was Edward Braden who was low bidder at \$119, 897. Large cut limestone blocks were quarried on the Falcones near Van Raub in Bexar County. Both size and fine cut of stones are excellent examples of the craftsmanship of San Antonio builders in the 19th Century.
4. The structure originally was designed as a three story building with basement. An octagonal clock tower 135 ' high and corner turrets were featured. The tower and top of turrets were removed in 1927 when a fourth floor was added and both major entrances remodeled.
5. Although many notable people have been involved as elected officials working in San Antonio City Hall, one of the most interesting was Maury Maverick, once Mayor, who as Congressman wrote the legislation leading to present historic preservation laws.

Part II Architectural Information

- A. The Italian Renaissance building faces both east and west and is symmetrical with the exception of the corner towers. Those on the north facade are square while those on the south are circular. This feature has resulted in reports that two architects were involved. This is erroneous. Architect Otto Kramer who was practicing in St. Louis at the time submitted the plans for the proposed building to the Mayor and City Council in this form. After his unique design was chosen, Mr. Kramer also was appointed superintendent of the project which was begun in 1888 and was completed in 1891. Cost of the work upon completion was \$200,000. The structure, prior to the addition of the fourth floor and removal of the turret roofs and the clock tower, was 80' by 120' and was "set off" by an octagonal clock tower 135' in height.
- B. Description of Interior. Council Chamber, Mayor's Offices, City Manager's Offices and conference rooms are found on the first floor which is dissected by a wide central hall. First floor is actually at almost a second floor level with a basement level featuring a moat design with window bays set in.

City Council offices, City Clerk and City Attorney with supporting facilities are located on the second floor. Remaining floors house some of the other Municipal offices.
- C. Site. The building sits in the center of one of the two principal plazas of the City. These plazas, Main and Military, have been the heart of San Antonio and the location of government since the early 1700's.

Main and Military Plaza Historic District is recognized locally and nationally as official historic district

The eastern facade faces San Fernando Cathedral, the church of the early Canary Island settlers 1738-1749, while the western facade faces the old Spanish Governor's Palace (1848), a one story Spanish Colonial townhouse originally used as the comandancia, headquarters and residence of the presidio of San Antonio de Bexar (the ranking representative of the Spanish king). Numerous plaques, statues and markers are located in the Plaza which contains numerous large native trees and plants in a parklike setting.

Part III: Sources of Information

A. Original architectural drawings have not been found, but a search is still underway.

B. Very few early photos have been found, but here again, a search is continuing.

C. Bibliography:

City Council Minutes, City Clerk's Office, City Hall.

Deed Records, Bexar County Courthouse.

Records, Bexar County Archives

HAES Study, San Antonio, 1968.

Records and documents, Library, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas.

Records, manuscripts, Historic Preservation Office, City of San Antonio.

Document files, Main Library, City of San Antonio.

National Register of historic Places Inventory, Main/Military Plaza June, 1979.

San Antonio Historic Survey, 1972, City of San Antonio.

Files, San Antonio Conservation Society.