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Sacramento City Hall
915 I Street
Sacramento
Sacramento County
California

HABS No. CA-418

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

"AMERICA'S CITY HALLS" PROJECT

Name: Sacramento City Hall
Location: 915 I Street
Present Owner: City of Sacramento
Present Occupant: Mayor and City Council, City Manager
City Clerk, Accounting, Engineering,
Finance Administration, Fire Administration,
Revenues and Collections, Weed Abatement
Present Use: City business

Significance: Sacramento's City Hall was completed in 1911 on what was then the fringe area of the old commercial district. The new City Hall structure was the first municipal building in Sacramento to house all city government offices under one roof. At that time, the city employed approximately 500 people.

City Hall was originally to have included the receiving hospital, city prison and police station, a common practice in other municipalities. But other cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, had dropped these facilities from their recently constructed City Halls. Sacramento's Mayor M. R. Beard, wanting to emulate these more progressive cities, therefore deleted the hospital and police facilities from the new building. The City Fathers felt this change would provide a more inviting public atmosphere.

The central tower of the building with its four clock faces became a useful landmark. The low silhouette of the Plaza Park trees and the relatively young plantings along "I" Street allowed

the clocks to be viewed from a much greater distance than today. A newspaper of the time noted how the trolley motormen would check their watches against the clocks as they passed City Hall.

City Hall is the finest representative of the Beaux Art style in Sacramento. It is sited dramatically opposite Plaza Park which serves as an attractive and appropriate landscape setting. Designed by Rudolph Herold, who was a skilled local architect of considerable virtuosity, the structure combines both exuberance and dignity into a distinguished civil work. The building continues today as the center of city government.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: In the early Spring of 1909 work began on the new City Hall building. The following Spring, City staff started moving into office space, although construction work was to continue for one more year. The building was completed in 1911.

In 1902 the City's rented offices were located throughout the downtown area. The public archives were insecure, there was no vault for the Treasury and no Assembly Chamber for public meetings. In that year, a bond issue was proposed for the construction of a City Hall, but was voted down. In 1906 a new bond issue was proposed and the following year, a special election was held. By a vote of 2,292 to 275, the citizens passed the issuance of 40-year 4% bonds for \$300,000 for a new City Hall.

Several sites were considered, however most proved to be too costly to purchase. Lots 5, 6, 7, and 8 on the south half of the block bounded by H-I, 9th - 10th Streets, facing Plaza Park were finally chosen. In December 1907, a resolution was adopted to condemn the site and Mayor M. R. Beard was authorized to employ an architect to prepare the plans. In May 1908, an ordinance was adopted selecting the present site and in December, Rudolph Herold's plans were approved. The following March, the contract for \$173,000 between the City and the contractor, Thompson-Starrett Company of New York was signed. Construction of the foundation began April 1909.

During the first week of April, 1910, City staff began moving into the new City Hall although work was still in progress in the Trustees Room and in all of the rooms on the third floor. The Board of Trustees, the Mayor, City Auditor and Assessor, City Clerk, City Collector, City Engineer, and Superintendent of Streets, were all relocated into the building at this time.

2. Architect: Rudolph A. Herold, employed by the City on August 22, 1910, designed the plans and specifications for Sacramento's City Hall. This is documented in Council minutes, newspaper articles and on the original plans.

Rudolph Herold, who would become known as one of the best architects in norther California, was born in San Francisco on December 25, 1870. He studied architecture in Europe and practiced in San Francisco before coming to Sacramento in 1901. Herold designed many of the public buildings in Sacramento, including the Forum Building, the Labor Temple, the Capitol National Bank, the Sacramento High School, and the County Courthouse. He also designed numerous small commercial buildings and private residences. In addition to the design of structures, he prepared landscape plans including garden fountains. Because of his continuing interest in environmental design, Herold was selected to represent the West Coast at the American Institute of Architect's first international meeting in New York City in 1925. Mr. Herold died April 24, 1926.

3. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: The Thompson-Starrett Company of New York was contracted in April 1909 to build City Hall for \$173,900. The work was to be completed in 225 working days. The exterior design of the building included granite for the steps and raised basement walls. Above that was pressed fired brick and glazed terra cotta ornamental work. In addition, pressed tin and cast zinc were used for cornices, decorative balustrades and decorative elements on the central clock tower.
4. Original Plans and Construction: the original plans for construction, as drawn by Rudolph Herold are currently located at City Hall, City Clerk's Office. Additional drawings for alterations, City Council Minutes, and contractual material are filed at the City-County Museum.
5. Alterations and Additions: The City Assessor's Office on the first floor was completely remodeled in the Spring of 1923 for \$2,200. New counters were especially installed to provide greater efficiency between the Tax Collector and the Assessor.

With Public Works Administration money granted the previous year, the first (westerly) annex was built in November, 1934. The building was designed by the local architect, Harry Devine, Sr., and constructed by the Campbell Construction Company for \$68,561 in the "Moderne style". The building is constructed of reinforced concrete. Three downtown fire houses moved into the first floor of the annex.

The second floor provided space for Fire Department offices and sleeping quarters for the firemen. The Water and Tax Collection departments were also relocated to the new annex.

Built as an extension of the first annex, the second (easterly) annex was completed in March 1939. It was built by the William C. Keating Construction Company of San Francisco at a cost of \$48,036. Relocated to the new annex were the Engineering Department, the Water Division and the Recreation Department.

The first and second annex are located to the north and the northwest at the rear of City Hall.

The interior of City Hall was again remodeled in 1939. Larger, more modern quarters were provided for the Building and Electrical Departments, Civil Service Office, Traffic Signs and Signals Department, City Clerk's Office, and City Purchasing Agent's Office. Additionally, the Council Chambers were renovated. The old lighting fixtures, desks and tables were removed. New features included a raised semi-circular dais, dark wood paneling with white fluted wood trim around the doors and windows and inlaid black and white linoleum on the floor. New globular light fixtures were placed on the ceiling. The public received a rostrum to address the Council and seats for the spectators.

In 1956, the entrance to City Hall was altered. As built, the exterior surface of the original wooden entry doors and frames was covered with 16 oz. planished copper held with copper screws. The metal hinges were solid polished bronze. Each door had one large glazed panel one-fourth inch thick. Because of wear, the main entrance doors were removed and replaced with treadle operated metal and glass doors.

In 1959, the Council Chambers were again remodeled. A new acoustical ceiling with recessed lighting was added as well as new upholstered seats for the audience. The room was now completely paneled. This closed off all window openings to the north, south and west. On the exterior, the dome's copper sheathing was replaced and parts of several high parapets were removed because they were loose and hazardous. There was also painting, plastering and patching on the City Hall, Annex and Firehouse.

In 1962, major interior and exterior cleaning, painting and repair of City Hall was executed. In 1981 office interior remodel work was initiated. The wall surfaces and door openings are being remodeled in a manner compatible to the original design.

B. Historical Context:

The City of Sacramento was chartered by the people on October 13, 1849. The City was incorporated on March 18, 1850. From 1894 to 1911, the City consisted of a Board of Trustees with the Mayor as a separate entity. In 1912, a year after the completion of City Hall, the City Commission form of government was established, and in 1921, the Council-City Manager form came into being.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

City Hall is a three-story and raised basement rectangular building on an east-west axis with a five-story central tower with cupola. Constructed of reinforced concrete and steel, the building is surfaced with terra cotta, granite and pressed brick. The structure is supported by brick, concrete beams and columns and cast in place concrete floors and roof. Granite was used as facing for the exterior walls from a level of four inches below the ground line to the base of the first floor. It was also used on the entrance steps and buttresses. The exterior of the first floor and building corners are pseudo rusticated pressed brick. The symmetrical east and west wings are divided by a central protruding portico which extends three stories and is composed of two parts. Extending the height of the first floor is a rusticated arched entry with radiating stones and projecting scroll keystone. Resting on the arch and extending the height of the second and third floors are two pairs of double Corinthian columns. Behind each column is an engaged Corinthian pilaster. The columns support an entablature consisting of a projecting three band architrave, a frieze decorated with the words "City Hall" and four discs, and a cornice. These discs are repeated on the friezes which band the entire building. The architrave, main cornice and balustrade also band the entire building at the roof line. The projecting center of the main cornice is topped with an ornamental terra cotta cartouche which is flanked by two eagles. The crown mold, fascia, paneled plancier, dentils and molded members of the main cornice are all made of galvanized iron. The ornamental medallions are of cast zinc.

On the front elevation, there are seven window openings per floor except on the first floor where there are six. On side elevations there are three openings per floor. Window openings are composed of three recessed double hung one-over-one wooden sash windows. First floor window openings are

recessed into brick arches with curved keystone. On the second and third floors, the openings are enframed by Corinthian pilasters. Ornamented segmental arches with cartouches crown the shallow bays at each end of the front elevations.

Rising above the double columned portico is a four-sided square tower containing single engaged Ionic columns framing a galvanized iron design surrounded by terra cotta garlands. A band cornice and terra cotta balustrade connect this to the tower cupola with a clock face on each of its four sides. The roof of the cupola has a copper covered dome with protruding ribs and a round finial. At the corners of the upper tower are engaged Doric columns supporting a broken gable with return.

A terra cotta cartouche is framed above the main gable and additional cartouches are used on the east and west elevations. The central cartouche, over the entry portico, originally had a large ornamental "S" for Sacramento.

B. Description of Interior:

The major architectural emphasis was placed on the exterior of City Hall. The interior received a finish far simpler than one would expect from the ornate detailing on the exterior. Only the central lobby and the main corridors were finished in cut stone with more ornately detailed moldings.

Over the years there have been many remodelings on the interior to meet the changing needs of the government. Little of the original interiors remain, interior walls have been replaced, false ceilings have been installed. Even now the interior is undergoing extensive rehabilitation.

The main entrance hall leads to the elevator and stairways with the main corridor extending to the right and left. The floor of the main entrance hall is tri-colored marble in the design of a radiating star. This entrance has marble wainscoting which extends eight feet high. Above this is a plastered wall and a plaster paneled and beamed ceiling. The paneling is painted white, gray and soft maroon. Two marble columns separate the hall from the main corridor. These columns have a molded base, a shaft in one piece, and a carved and molded cap. The original interior millwork was all eastern birch, storeroom millwork was in yellow pine.

Corridor floors which originally were marble are now linoleum and only edged with marble. The corridors still retain their original four foot wainscoting above which are plaster walls.

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The plaster walls of the corridors and those in the Trustees' and Board of Education rooms were originally painted with stencilled borders. The original plaster beam and panel ceilings in the corridors remain undecorated. Now painted white, they were originally tinted.

The present Council Chamber, originally the Trustees' meeting room, is two stories in height extending from the second floor to the ceiling of the third floor. The room as built had a plaster beam and panel ceiling. It now reflects the 1959 remodeling and no longer has the 10-foot high wood wainscoting.

The offices of the City Attorney and Commissioners were originally located in the east wing of the third floor. Each was decorated with white oak and contained a fireplace with tiled mantle. The fireplaces and mantles have long since been removed.

A six-foot high, 12-foot diameter galvanized iron water tank is located in the tower of the building. The service of this tank was discontinued in 1935 when the city water pressure became adequate for City Hall use. Prior to that, the tank was used as an auxiliary means of building up water pressure at night for daytime use.

- C. The City Hall is sited on the south side of the H-I 9th and 10th block. The building sits back approximately 25-feet from the street and extends nearly the entire length of lots 6 and 7. Originally, a black iron fence next to the sidewalk surrounded the front lawn. In 1927, a two-foot decorative cement frame was installed as a retaining wall for the terraced landscape. The retaining wall has been removed and the grass lawn now slopes to the street. In 1948, the northwest corner of the City Hall lawn was leveled and converted to off-street parking for City employees. In 1962, \$7,500 was allocated to light up City Hall at night. Four poles with mounted floodlights were placed along the front and sides of the building. Six floodlights were also mounted on top of the building for total illumination.

The building's front elevation faces the north side of Plaza Park. One of the oldest parks in Sacramento, Plaza Park was donated to the City for public use by John Sutter, Jr., in 1849. The geometric layout of the park with a central fountain helps emphasize the symmetry of City Hall's facade.

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On the east, the building is bounded by a City owned two-story parking structure. A United States Post Office building occupies the south one-half of the block west of City Hall. The north one-half of the block on which City Hall is located, is occupied by blacktop surface parking and small City auxillary office buildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Drawings located at the City-County Museum

1. Foundation - 1909
2. Elevator - 1909
3. Interior Fixtures - n.d.
4. Oil tanks - n.d.
5. Remodeling Building - 1913
6. Counter fittings - Assessor's Office - 1914
7. Alterations - 1921
8. Council Chamber Alterations - n.d.
9. City Hall Annex - West Wing - n.d. (1934?)
10. Remodeling Council Chambers - 1959

Drawings located at City Hall

1. Original plans and specifications - 1906

B. Early Views:

Photographs located at the City-County Museum

1. View from Plaza Park - ca. 1920's
2. Aerial view - 1927
3. View from California State Life Building - 1932
4. View from Library corner - ca. 1930's
5. View of front and east elevation - 1951

Photographs located at the California State Library

1. View from Plaza Park - n.d. - ca. 1920's
2. View of front and east elevation - n.d. ca. 1920's
3. View from Plaza Park - n.d. - ca. 1920's
4. View from northwest corner of Plaza Park- n.d. ca. 1920's
5. View from northwest corner of Plaza Park- n.d. ca. 1920's
6. View overlooking Plaza Park from upper story of building on "J" Street - ca. 1925
7. View taken from northwest corner of Plaza Park-n.d.-ca.194
8. View taken from northwest corner of Plaza Park-n.d.-ca.194
9. View taken from northeast corner of 9th and "J" St. 1942

10. View taken from Plaza Park - 1942

Photographs located at the City Library:

1. Interior view of City Manager's Office -
n.d. - ca. 1940's
2. Interior view of City Manager's Office -
n.d. - ca. 1940's
3. Worm's eye view of entrance and tower - 1960

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary Sources:

The Sacramento Bee; 24 June 1912; 11 October 1921;
29 December 1931; 29 November 1934.

The Sacramento Union; 6 December 1907; 29 December 1908;
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2. Secondary Sources:

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Date: September 22, 1981

ADDENDUM TO:
SACRAMENTO CITY HALL
915 I Street
Sacramento
Sacramento County
California

HABS CA-418
HABS CAL,34-SAC,48-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SACRAMENTO CITY HALL

ADDENDUM TO HABS No. CA-418

HABS No. CA-418

- Location:** 915 I Street, Sacramento, Sacramento County, California
(See original HABS No. 418 for UTM coordinates)
- Significance:** See original HABS No. 418 for Significance
- Description:** See original HABS No. 418, HABS 418-A for Description
- Historical Context:** See original HABS No. 418 for Historical Context
- Sources:** See original HABS No. 418 for Sources
- Project Information:** The proposed Project is the construction of a new City Administration Building on the north half of the block bounded by H and I, 9th and 10th Streets, adjacent to the existing 1910 City Hall structure. The Project will include a seismic stabilization of the City Hall. The Project will also include some rehabilitation of the historic City Hall in order to refine its functions in concert with the new building and conduct important maintenance and repair work. The 1930s Annex will be demolished.