

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER
LISTED

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Oklahoma City Municipal Building

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 200 North Walker Avenue [N/A] not for publication

city or town Oklahoma City [N/A] vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Oklahoma code 109 zip code 73102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In
my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be
considered significant [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer Date April 27, 2007

Oklahoma Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- [] entered in the National Register
[] See continuation sheet.
[] determined eligible for the
National Register
[] See continuation sheet.
[] determined not eligible for the
National Register.
[] removed from the National Register
[] See continuation sheet.
[] other, explain
[] See continuation sheet.

Horizontal lines for signature and date input.

Oklahoma City Municipal Building
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma
County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	1	structures
2	1	objects
4	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city hall

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls STONE: Limestone

roof _____

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Oklahoma City Municipal Building
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma
County/State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance

1936-1937

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Allied Architects of Oklahoma City, architects
Charles A. Dunning Construction Co., builder

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO

Oklahoma City Municipal Building
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 14 634260 3925850
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing [] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Julie Bennett-Jones, graduate student
organization University of Central Oklahoma date December, 2006
street & number 100 N University Dr. telephone _____
city or town Edmond state OK zip code 73034

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Oklahoma City (attn. James D. Couch, City Manager)
street & number 200 N Walker Ave 3rd Floor telephone 405/297-2345
city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73102-2232

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

Oklahoma City Municipal Building
Oklahoma County, Oklahoma

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DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Oklahoma City Municipal Building, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was constructed between 1936 and 1937. Designed by an eleven member group known as the Allied Architects of Oklahoma City, it is classified as Art Deco, specifically "PWA Deco".¹ The building itself, a limestone structure with a concrete foundation, is four stories atop a partial above-grade basement and capped with a hipped roof. Located in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, the Municipal Building and its surroundings encompass an entire city block and is oriented east/west. Due to its location, the building holds one of the more prominent positions in the downtown area. The building is located on the west 1/3 of the block and is bounded by Walker Avenue to the west, Couch Drive to the north, Hudson Avenue to the east, and Colcord Drive to the south, the environs of the building consist of trees, manicured lawns, flowerbeds, and a unique reflecting pool to the east of the building.

EXTERIOR:

Stylistically, the building is characterized as Art Deco, although the ornament of the building reflects a stylization of Classical Revival motifs. The stylization of the Classical Revival form and ornamentation was popular for public construction in the 1930s and early 1940s, particularly for projects funded by the Public Works Administration and courthouses. This modern treatment of Classicism is currently referred to as "PWA Deco." This term originated because of the high prevalence of stylized Classical Revival found on PWA financed projects. This "modern" design took classical forms and symmetry and "jazzed" it up. Much of what we call Art Deco was called "modern" architecture at the time it was built. Early Art Deco was geometric and stylized. In taking Classical forms and stylizing them, the architects created a new form that falls under the Art Deco category.

The building is axially and reflectively symmetrical. The footprint of the building is roughly rectangular. Its orientation is east/west; these elevations are the main facades and are identical. The north and south elevations are also identical and each has a secondary entrance. Fenestration is regular. The window openings are original, but the sash has been replaced, although the replacement sash matches the original closely.

The exterior walls are composed of buff Bedford limestone backed up with brick, and a considerable quantity of ornamental metalwork appears on the main-entrance façade.² The building is embellished with fluted pilasters, a highly ornamented cornice with high parapet and elaborate, abstract, low relief sculpture panels above the doors and windows. The ornamentation and other features of the building demonstrate the typical features of government buildings constructed in Oklahoma in the 1930s. One of the more unique features of the building include the elegant art deco motifs. These hold particular importance to the people of Oklahoma City. The elegant stylized "sunrise" motifs inspired the City's logo, adopted in 2004.³

The Municipal Building and its surrounding area occupies the entire block between Walker Avenue to the west, Couch Drive to the north, Hudson Avenue to the east, and Colcord Drive to the south. The structure is located on

¹ Jim Edwards and Hal Ottaway. *The Vanished Splendor II: A Postcard Album of Oklahoma City* (Oklahoma City, OK: Abalanche Book Shop Publishing Co., 1983), #232.

² C.W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings: Architecture under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*. Volume I. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 28.

³ City of Oklahoma City. "City Hall-the Municipal Building-is the historic 'capitol' of Oklahoma City government" <http://www.okc.gov/query.html?city_hall/index.html>.

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Block 63A, created by the vacated railroad right-of-way. The building faces west toward Walker Avenue and the Civic Center Auditorium and also east across the reflecting pool toward Hudson Avenue and the Oklahoma County Courthouse. Lush grounds surround the building on all sides. Manicured lawns and flowerbeds with trees create a rich breathing space in the midst of an urban setting. Sidewalks with lighting follow the edge of the block's area.

Built on a foundation of concrete, the Oklahoma City Municipal Building stands four stories tall on a partial above-grade basement. The top floor is recessed and is not readily visible from the street. The exterior is composed of Bedford limestone and is bilaterally symmetric with alternating vertical bays of windows and fluted pilasters. The base itself is sheathed with granite. The large central entry bay appears identical on both the east and west sides. The entry bay has a stepped parapet with low relief decorative panels in the parapet above the pilasters and flanking the vertical rows of windows. (Photographs # 1, 10, & 11)

Beginning with the western side of the ground floor, fourteen four-pane windows are placed in three different sets over the course of the building. (Photo #11) From left to right, the first four windows are set into the main portion of the building. The next six windows are set into the main entry bay that extends from the main portion of the building and are separated by six pilasters. The three main entry doors in the center of the entry bay break the continuity of the six windows; this separates them into two groups of three windows on each side of the doors. The two windows extending to the left and the two extending to the right from the main entry doors are covered with historic metalwork. This metalwork extends upwards to cover the second, third, and fourth floor windows that correspond to the placement of these four windows. These cast aluminum grilles are geometric, with a series of long rectangles of open grillwork highlighted by panels of sinuous, flowering vines. The remaining windows on the first floor, located to the right of the main entry doors are set into the main portion of the building. In the center of the first floor is the main entry area with steps leading up to the three main entry doors. Two beautiful examples of aluminum art deco light fixtures are located to the left and right of the stairway. (Photo #9) These beautiful light fixtures also appear on either side of the stairs at the east entrance, and north and south entrances that go down to the basement. The primary doors are original and composed of aluminum with ornamentation near the handles. The east façade is identical to that of the west. The north and south sides of the building are identical. Each of these sides contains seven windows in the style of that found on the other two sides. The first, second, and third floors are identical in composition and style. In the ground floor is a centered, single door. (Photos #2, 3)

The historic aluminum fixed windows were replaced with dark-rimmed four-pane windows with the same dimensions. This replacement occurred in 2002 in an attempt to increase energy efficiency. The windows, however, look like the previous ones.

Elegant art deco motifs adorn the cornice of the building. On the north and south sides and continuing around the corner to the projecting central bay, a belt of *bas relief* panels marks the otherwise unadorned cornice. The typical pattern is a series of five stemmed flowers punctuated on each side by a stylized acanthus leaf design in a slightly larger panel. Extending inwards from the corner, the series of flowers increases to ten. This decorative detail also extends to the area above the three main doors at the east and west side entrances. Centered above each door is an excellent period light-piece with the famous sunrise-style and acanthus leaf motifs to either side of the light. Two other sunrise-style designs are located a few inches to either side of the light and appear as mirror images of each other. The cornice of the projecting bay has a frieze with the inscription "MUNICIPAL BUILDING" centered and *bas relief* panels with an acanthus leaf and flower petal design. Above the frieze is a string course consisting of panels of swags and flower petals.

Interesting features of the exterior of the structure include various inscriptions and the cornerstone. The cornerstone, located on the northeast corner of the structure lists the names of those who held important city

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positions at the time such as the city councilmen and the city manager. Unfortunately, it is partially obstructed by tree overgrowth. It also lists the name of the company that built it, Chas M. Dunning Construction Company. The motto over the east and west entrances reads "DEDICATED TO THE PEOPLE OF OKLAHOMA CITY AND FOR THE PERPETUATION OF GOOD GOVERNMENT."

The Municipal Building is the only building located on the grounds. To the east of it, however, lies a unique and historic feature to the grounds. The municipal building and surrounding area were meant to combine the function of government in a park-like space and atmosphere. To create a beautiful breathing space in the midst of downtown, a reflecting pool was included in the original design. "[A] reflecting basin and illuminated fountain (which incidentally aerates the water used for summer air-conditioning) greets the visitor."⁴ This reflecting pool only adds to the beauty of the structure and surroundings by reflecting "the white limestone building and the blue Oklahoma sky by day, and the fountain splashes under varicolored lights by night. It is fitting that the reflecting basin has been dedicated to the pioneers of '89 who laid the groundwork for a thriving metropolis."⁵ On the west side of the reflecting pool is the memorial to the pioneers of 1889, to which this statement refers. This black-granite memorial with two granite steps, flanked on either side by limestone, is also where the water cascades out in five falls out to fill the reflecting pool. Two sides of it depict scenes relating to the land run. These two panels, made of aluminum, contain the images of figures protruding from the material in *bas-relief*. On the northwestern side of the monument is a picture of the land run and is entitled, "The Run, April 22, 1889." The southwest side of the monument is of a family staking their claim and is entitled, "Staking the Claim, April 22, 1889." The name of the artist appears at the lower right hand corner, Will Smith. Both images are set into the black granite of the monument. (Photo #1)

Set into the ground, near the sidewalk and flanking the reflecting pool are two, small, limestone markers. Each reads "Dedicated to those who served to perpetuate peace World War I and II. Harmony Chapter No. 3 August 22, 1942. A large "V" and the emblem of the American War Mothers is centered on each marker.

There are two noncontributing resources located on the municipal building grounds. Directly to the east of the building in front of the reflecting pool, there is a black metal Oklahoma Centennial clock. This clock, sold by the Centennial Commission is typical of those going up all over the state to honor Oklahoma's hundred years of statehood. Additionally, to the west of the building near the street is a map encased in plastic display showing the interesting sites of downtown Oklahoma City and a city bus stop shelter.

INTERIOR:

Overall, the interior retains a high degree of integrity. The public spaces have maintained their unique historic features and finishes to a remarkable degree. There, of course, have been modifications over the past seventy years, including a restoration project. From 1995 to 1998, the Municipal Building underwent a massive restoration and upgrade. The goal of the restoration process was to return the building to its historic art deco design while also upgrading modern office space. The architect of the project was Rand Elliot from Elliot & Associates Architects of Oklahoma City. One of the most beautiful and unique features of the interior still remains—seven varieties of marble were used and can be seen as decorative elements throughout the building. The restoration project paid special attention to preserving the original decorative accents on each floor.

Entering from the west side, there are three main doorway entrances. Once inside, these three doorways open to a small anteroom which extends to another group of three doorway entrances. This inner area contains beautifully detailed aluminum grates with a chevron pattern the area also is where the many colors of marble

⁴ Ralph Spangler, ed. *Oklahoma City*. Oklahoma City, OK: (H. Dorsey Douglas, 1937) 1-5.

⁵ Lucyl Shirk. *Oklahoma City: Capital of Soonerland*. (Oklahoma City, OK: Semco Color Press, 1957.), 53.

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become visible. The floors are Montana travertine. Two plaques are also located in this area. One states, "The Allied Architects of Oklahoma City, Leonard H. Bailey, T.R. Bramblet, C.F. Drury, Ed L. Gahl, John D. Jeffers, C.L. Monnot, B. Gaylord Noftsker, Guy C. Reid, W.H. Schumacher, Walter T. Vahlberg, George Winkler." The other states, "Municipal Building, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Project Number Oklahoma 1005-R." These plaques also appear on the walls inside the inner area of the east entrance of the building. The inner doors resemble the outer doors in style and composition. These inner doors open up to the main lobby. Above the interior side of these doors is a clock, inset into the wall and flanked by acid-etched black marble in an abstract wing motif. The face of the clock is rectangular and lacks numbers. (Photo #7)

Inside the main lobby are visual treasures for the observer. The focal point of the lobby is an inlaid Travertine marble compass composed of different colors of marble. At the very center of the compass appear the words, "Elev. 1207.02 Above Sea Level, City Datum 141.25 O.C.E.D." Nine beautiful, hanging, circular period light fixtures extend from the ceiling in three rows of three. The ceiling is coffered and has stylized bead and reel molding. The stairway is located above the west entrance. (Photo # 6) It extends from the first to the third floors. The fourth floor is accessible by a separate stairway located on the south side of the building from the third floor. Two elevators, however, run the entire course of the building. These elevators, located just north of the main lobby have beautiful and intricate designs on their brushed aluminum doors. At the top of the rose-colored marble columns in the main lobby are black marble with intricate etchings.

The stairs extending to the second and third floors have a unique feature--the top is made of a rose-colored marble with the underside made of black marble for an elegant effect. The sides of the stairway are rose marble and extend approximately six feet above the steps. The side railing of the stairway is rose marble with black marble at the top just below the hand rails, and the bottom near the steps. Ascending the steps to the second floor, there is a large main area with the council chamber straight across from the stairway. A historic 46-star flag hangs in the second floor lobby. The Council Chamber is used by many other departments and agencies, including the Airport Trust, Water Utility Trust, Planning Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and OCMAPS Trust for public meetings. (Photo #4) Inside the chamber lies more visual treasures--Indian head chandeliers. These chandeliers are square in shape and display the heads of an Indian chief in full feathered headdress--one on each side. (Photo #5) This floor is unique because of a specific embellishment unique to the second floor--where the pillars meet the ceiling are decorative wood brackets.

The third floor is the last floor that extends the full length of the building. Ascending the stairway from the second floor, it opens to a small reception area. Newer lighting appears on the third and fourth floors. The stairway to the fourth floor is located to the south of the reception area. The fourth floor is smaller in size than the first three floors. Examining the building from the outside, the entrance areas on the east and west sides are extended from the main building to form a sort of square shape when examined from an aerial view. This square extends to the fourth floor while the two northern and southern "wings" do not. The fourth floor and is a maze of hallways and offices and is more pragmatic with few decorative or stylistic elements.

As City Hall, the structure contains the offices of the Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Municipal Counselor, City Clerk, City Auditor and Public Information and Marketing. Thus it retains its original purpose--to be the seat of government for Oklahoma City.

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS

Overall, the Oklahoma City Municipal Building retains a high degree of integrity. The building maintains its integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The exterior of the building has been most notably altered by the modification of the windows in 2002. The replacement of the historic aluminum fixed windows with modern dark metal windows is a visible change. However, as the size and pattern

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of the windows were not changed, this alteration does not destroy the ability of the building to convey its historical significance. The windows were replaced with energy-efficient look-alikes. The main alteration to the grounds of the building, particularly the addition of the Centennial clock does not significantly influence the structure's integrity.

The interior renovation and restoration that occurred from 1995 to 1998 also has little impact on the building's integrity. Changes to the interior actually restored much of it to its 1937 appearance. False ceilings were removed and replaced with higher ceilings that the original building contained. As a result, some door-top transom windows, many original, can be open and shut to allow air flow.⁶ Inside the Council Chambers, a drop ceiling which was added in the 1980s was removed thus revealing the original moldings in the plaster ceiling. Other modifications included the removal of the press box balcony from the north end and built into the south wall. Some florescent lighting was replaced with incandescent lights to give off a warm, golden glow. Office space was rearranged in order to increase the usefulness of the area. The rehabilitation maintained historical integrity while also improving the building. Other historic features of the building remain unchanged including its distinctive marble walls and terrazzo floors. (Photo #8) Overall, the interior maintains its integrity of materials, workmanship, design, feeling and association to an excellent degree. The exterior, likewise, maintains its integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.⁷

⁶ Daily Oklahoman, 11 April 1997.

⁷ Daily Oklahoman, 15 October 1996

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SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Oklahoma City Municipal Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Completed in 1937, the building was designed by the collaborative effort of eleven architects known as the Allied Architects of Oklahoma City. It was constructed using monies provided by the federal government's Public Works Administration (PWA), as well as a municipal bond voted for by the citizens of Oklahoma City. The period of significance begins when the new plans for the city were created by the well-known Kansas City-based architectural and planning firm, Hare & Hare in the late 1920s and submitted to the City Planning Commission on December 24, 1930 through 1937, when the Civic Center complex was completed. The Civic Center complex, of which the Municipal Building is at the heart, reflects the movement of Oklahoma City from a congested "big town" to a modern metropolis.⁸ It is significant under Criterion A for its role in community planning and development on the local level and as a tangible example of the works projects financed by the PWA, a New Deal-era building program that helped revitalize the economy during the trying years of the Great Depression. Under Criterion C, the courthouse is architecturally significant as an excellent example of an Art Deco style public building in Oklahoma City, part of a unified complex of "modern design" in the heart of the city.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND:

During the 1800s, the United States government forcibly relocated Indian tribes from across the country into what is now Oklahoma. One area in the center of this territory remained unallocated to any tribe. This became the Unassigned Lands. In the 1880s, landless pioneers looked greedily upon the area. Some began entering the land illegally with two aims in mind—to obtain "free" land, and to force the federal government to open up the territory for homesteading. Soon, their numbers grew and the government acquiesced. President Benjamin Harrison signed the legislation to open up the territory on March 2, 1889. The "run" was held on April 22, 1889, when tens of thousands of settlers surrounded the area awaiting the noon signal to cross the line and stake their claim. People came from all over the United States for this chance. When the signal came, they surged forward using whatever mode of transportation they could obtain—wagon, horse, bicycle, train, or foot.⁹ By train, the settlers came from the south, on the Santa Fe tracks that led north from Purcell. Upon arrival, would-be settlers ignored the signs demarking an area delineated by two plowed furrows, 200 feet apart. The sign read "Keep Off. Right-of-way Choctaw Railway Co."¹⁰

Oklahoma City was born amidst this excitement. Soon, a tent city rose from the prairie. Chaos reigned supreme. No city government existed—it had to be made from scratch. Elections were held in May to select officials. By the next month, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce was created. Their first aim involved attracting railroads to the city. Once this aim was achieved they focused on attracting new industries. The city grew quickly during this period. According to census data, the population in 1890 consisted of just over 4,000 people. In ten year's time, the population was just over 10,000. By 1910, the population stood at over 64,000! The growth demonstrates the importance of Oklahoma City as a center of commerce. That same year, a popular vote was held to select a permanent state capital. The candidates were the original capital city of Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Shawnee. Oklahoma City won and within a day of the vote the Governor, Charles Haskell, and the State Seal made their new home in Oklahoma City (at a temporary headquarters in the Lee-Huckins Hotel). The state capitol building was dedicated in 1917. As the state capital, the city continued to grow and prosper. With

⁸ City of Oklahoma City. "City Hall." Also *Daily Oklahoman* 18 April, 1937.

⁹ Oklahoma City Convention and Visitor's Bureau. "Oklahoma City History," <<http://www.okccvb.org/history.html>>.

¹⁰ *Daily Oklahoman*, 18 April, 1937.

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the discovery of oil in Oklahoma City in 1928, a new era dawned for the community. The Oklahoma City Field created the city's most important financial source.¹¹

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Three years after the land-run into the Unassigned Lands, Oklahoma City acquired its first City Hall. The progression of City Halls presents a unique history unto itself, and reveals the need that existed for centralizing the city government in one building that could serve as a sense of pride for its citizens. The old City Hall owed its existence to "two bits of civic 'finagling,' one in 1892, the other in 1900."¹² O.A. Mitscher, elected mayor in 1892, detested how the city offices were scattered in buildings throughout the town. He wanted them united under one roof. The city obtained title to two lots on which the City Hall would eventually be built, but it did not have possession of the property. Two brothers, suspected of entering the Unassigned lands before the official time, operated a saloon on the corner of Grand and Broadway. When the city obtained title, the brothers tied up the city's claim in the courts. Thus, they remained the occupants for five or six years. The mayor, unhappy with these results, ordered the police chief to raid the saloon and take the two men into custody. During this action, the mayor appeared with the city clerk. They took possession of the building and within hours, the other city offices had moved in. Apparently, the brothers never contested the action. Thus, Oklahoma City obtained its first official City Hall in 1892.¹³

The other interesting event concerning City Hall occurred in 1900. After the census, the city's population appeared to be 9,990 residents. Only ten more were needed for the city to be able to issue bonds to finance public buildings. The city fathers discovered twelve people who claimed they had not been included in the census. A representative was sent to Washington who persuaded the bureau of census to honor the twelve other residents. As a result, the city was able to issue bonds to build new public buildings—one of which was the City Hall. The cornerstone was placed on September 10, 1901 with the entire city participating in the celebration. Senator C. Porter Johnson was the keynote speaker. In his speech, he demonstrated the promise of a bright future visible to so many Oklahoma City residents, "This building is the result of united efforts of those sturdy pioneers who journ[ied] to this city over a decade ago. Long before they have passed away their descendants will enjoy the benefits and blessings wrought at their hands."¹⁴ Although his speech at City Hall's dedication displayed enthusiastic optimism, the building itself would prove to be inadequate and costly for the city. Built at a cost of \$26,000, by 1921 an extensive remodeling was necessary after a fire damaged the building. Another fire in 1927 weakened the structure even more. The city spent more for repairs during the building's career than the original cost of the building. Those who worked there described the building as having cramped quarters and a dank basement. Thus, a need existed for a new City Hall—and was fulfilled when the Municipal Building was completed in 1937 as a result of vacated railroad property, help from the PWA, and a municipal bond.¹⁵

The railroads represented life or death to western towns. Many of the first settlers who came to the city rode in on the Santa Fe tracks; upon arrival they found an already-laid out right-of-way for an east/west road, the Choctaw Railway. Early on, this juxtaposition of rail lines in the heart of the city was recognized as both a boon and a drawback, "(the Choctaw line) in the very heart of the city...will be a constant source of irritation until they are removed as they must be at some date in the future" remarked the *Evening Gazette* on September 10, 1889; yet,

¹¹ Oklahoma City Convention and Visitor's Bureau. "Oklahoma City History,"

¹² *Daily Oklahoman*, 24 February 1938.

¹³ Lura J Wilson. "Old City Hall—Oklahoma City." On-file in the Oklahoma City City Hall Folder of the Archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1938.

¹⁴ *Daily Oklahoman*, 24 February 1938.

¹⁵ Shirk. *Oklahoma City: Capital of Soonerland.*, 53, and *Daily Oklahoman*, 24 February 1938.

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less than two months later the same paper stated that, "We must have the road."¹⁶ The problems of the downtown rail lines was a constant headache for the city and its citizens. From 1911 until 1927, the city and the State Corporation Commission negotiated with, cajoled, and threatened the Rock Island and Frisco railroads into abandoning their downtown stations and tracks in lieu of a Union Station south of the city core. The Chamber of Commerce in 1911 passed a resolution that stated: "The great and rapid growth of this city has rendered the railroad grade crossings over much used and prominently located streets in the city a grave menace to the public safety as well as a serious impediment to the speedy and expeditious transaction of business on the streets."¹⁷ In 1927, after years of orders from the Corporation Commission and eventually the courts, the two railroad companies abandoned their downtown stations and moved south. New rail lines were constructed to serve Union Station, making the old lines superfluous. The rail companies no longer needed the right-of-way in the center of the town. In 1928, citizens of Oklahoma City voted for a bond issue to buy the railroad right-of-way property at a cost of four million dollars.¹⁸

With the new land acquisition in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, the well-known Kansas City-based architectural and planning firm, Hare & Hare, was asked to develop a comprehensive city plan in 1928. They were in charge of writing a final report containing historical data, socio-demographic data, a street plan, a civic center plan, a parks plan, a zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. They submitted their plan to the City Planning Commission on December 24, 1930. The City Plan for Oklahoma City was the first comprehensive plan for the city.¹⁹ This plan would become the model followed in the development of the Civic Center. The Municipal Building is one part of what was then referred to as the Civic Center—a group of three buildings that incorporated local government and public entertainment in a park-like atmosphere. Going from west to east, the Civic Center was made up of the Civic Center Auditorium, a park area, the Municipal Building, and finally the County Courthouse. The building and landscaping of this area was partially funded by the Public Works Administration.

The Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works or PWA was created to "prepare a comprehensive program of public works."²⁰ It was one of twenty-nine different acts created between 1933 and 1939 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt proposed such legislation, referred to as his "New Deal" to help those affected by the trying years of the Great Depression as well as stimulate the national economy. The PWA played into the "New Deal" programs by providing employment and an aid to industry, as well as providing public works useful for their "enduring social value."²¹ The PWA cooperated with federal, state, county, and city governments to generate employment. Local political bodies submitted applications to the PWA for the construction of improvements. The PWA would review the applications. Each application needed to meet three qualifications. The first qualification ensured that the application was submitted by a public body representing the people and made certain that the project complied with local, state, and national laws. The second qualification examined the financial perspective ensure that the project was sound and the applicant could provide its share of the construction costs. The third qualification scrutinized the project's feasibility from an engineering standpoint. If a project was approved, the PWA would make a grant or loan to a public body for the hiring of architects, contractors, and laborers to construct useful public works. The PWA retained the right to supervise the project through its construction and ensure that their specifications were met. Once the building was finished, the PWA

¹⁶ *Daily Oklahoman*, 18 April 1937, page E 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Daily Oklahoman*, 3 March 1936.

¹⁹ City of Oklahoma City. "City Hall."

²⁰ Cynthia Savage, "Building the Grady County Courthouse: The Public Works Administration Amidst Local Politics." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 84, no. 1 (2006): 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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retained no control over the use or ownership of the structure.²² In all, over 4,000 buildings across the nation were constructed using PWA funds. Of those, only 206 were city or town halls. Within Oklahoma, the PWA assumed 302 projects with non-federal partners. In total gifts, the PWA granted over \$100,000,000 for construction of various governmental buildings.²³ Enough cannot be said about the participation of the PWA on this project. Without them, the buildings may never have been built.

In the case of the Civic Center, the PWA provided an up-front funding of forty-five percent of the costs with the rest loaned by the government but paid by a municipal bond. The city manager at the time, Orval Mosier, is credited as being one of the main leaders in getting the project accomplished. The city council members of the time included Robert M. Scott, W.A. Henderson, C.R. Donert, A.D. Estabrook, C.T. Lockwood, A.J. Moore, Joe C. Campbell and Harlow Gers with Frank Martin as the mayor. The city's share of the program was computed to cost taxpayers \$1,640,750, including interest. When calculated out, if the city had attempted to finance the building without federal aid, the program would have cost over \$5,000,000. Apparently, the financing of forty-five percent of the project by the federal government represented a liberalization in policy. Up to this time, the government made grants of thirty percent and loaned the remainder.²⁴ The Municipal Building, itself, was erected at a cost of \$585,257.²⁵ An eleven member group known as the Allied Architects of Oklahoma City designed the structure. These architects included: Leonard H. Bailey, T.R. Bramblet, C.F. Drury, Ed Gahl, John D. Jeffers, C.L. Monnot, B. Gaylord Noftger, Guy C. Reid, W. H. Schumacher, Walter Vahlberg, and George Winkler. The company that built the building was the Chas M. Dunning Construction Company. According to the Assistant City Manager at the time, Morrison B. Cunningham, the building project of the Civic Center employed approximately 400 people in March 1936.²⁶

The construction of the Civic Center came under scrutiny in the early months of 1936 in an interesting political battle. A case concerning the property the three buildings sit on went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which reversed the decisions of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. On March 28, 1891, George Noble gave the title of his land to the railroad on the condition that the land would revert back to him--the original property owner--if the property was at any time vacated by the railroad. The Nobles had owned land east of Walker Avenue. Another case was also brought on a claim sold by Dr. R.W. Higgins to the railroad.²⁷ Charles H. Garrett, the attorney who successfully attacked the city's claims to the Civic Center property before the United States Supreme Court, expressed the position of his clients that construction (which was already underway at this time) should not be halted.²⁸ The original suit by George Noble was brought about in 1930. The two cases met with different results. After a seven-year legal battle, the Higgins lost their case while the Nobles won theirs. In the end, the entire amount of land in question by the Noble family consisted of a tract of land only 50 feet long by 25 feet wide. The final court's solution determined that Noble could recover money for the property.²⁹

Even with the various complications, the new Civic Center became an area of immense pride for the citizens of Oklahoma City. On the first day of the Municipal Building's Open House, March 7, 1937, over 3,500 people attended. "Oklahoma City turned out to oh and ah at its newest and most dazzling toy Sunday--the new \$650,000 city hall."³⁰ In addition to guides, employees were on hand to create atmosphere. It was estimated that

²² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

²³ *America Builds: The Record of PWA.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 283-291.

²⁴ *Daily Oklahoman*, 25 May 1935.

²⁵ City of Oklahoma City. "City Hall."

²⁶ *Daily Oklahoman*, 3 March 1936.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1937.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 March 1937.

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over 15,000 people visited the City Hall.³¹ Other elements of citizen pride became visible in various forms. According to a Daily Oklahoman article of the time, the May issue of Holland's Magazine contained a full page article on Oklahoma City's new building endeavor entitled "Oklahoma City Builds a Civic Center."³²

Within the area, various citizens expressed their views of the new building project. "Civic Center...is one of the most pretentious group of public office buildings in the Southwest and, loyal citizens claim, in the nation. Visitors from the East...are amazed at the dignity and beauty of the imposing municipal and county buildings."³³ Perhaps one of the most visible evidence of citizen pride in the new Civic Center was the creation of a history book about Oklahoma City. In the opening section appears the explanation of why the book was written, "a 1937 presentation inspired by the completion of the great new civic center."³⁴ The next several pages describe the buildings of the Civic Center at a rate of one per page with extensive photographs.

The fountain area on the east side of the Municipal Building grounds was dedicated with a parade and large pageant. A "Pioneer Day" gala was planned with bands, covered wagons, equestrians, school, civic, and commercial floats with a '89er section that included an ox cart and women of '89 riding side saddle. This entire event was planned to dedicate the memorial fountain east of the city hall in honor of those who made the run into the Unassigned lands in 1889. Dr. A.C. Scott delivered the address entitled "Founding of Oklahoma City."³⁵ The entire Civic Center area was a visible symbol of pride for the citizens of Oklahoma City. By memorializing the settlers of 1889 on the grounds of the Municipal Building, they set their City Hall apart from the other buildings of the Center.

The Civic Center accomplished the mission of its early visionaries—as a location to incorporate local government and public entertainment in a park-like environment which could instill pride in Oklahoma City citizens. With the construction of a new City Hall, the city government was able to function with better efficiency. The improved facilities centralized the seat of city government and allowed for expansion of services. Additionally, the new buildings enhanced the community identity. Currently, the Municipal Building serves the same purpose as when it was built—City Hall. It houses the offices of the Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Municipal Counselor, City Clerk, City Auditor, Public Information and Marketing, the Action Center, City Print Shop, and a broadcast control room for City Channel 20 (the City's government access cable channel).

ARCHITECTURAL AND PLANNING SIGNIFICANCE

"When the group known as Allied Architects got together to map plans for the municipal building they decided that inasmuch as the building would occupy the most prominent position in Civic Center it should be monumental in its effect.

Accordingly they selected the classic style for its precedent, then freely modernized it to follow the more truthfully expressed trend toward modern use of building materials and to harmonize with the other buildings in the center"³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 10 May 1938.

³³ "Civic Center." On-file in the Oklahoma City Public Buildings Folder of the Archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1.

³⁴ Ralph Spangler. *Oklahoma City*. 1.

³⁵ *Daily Oklahoman*, 22 April 1938.

³⁶ *Daily Oklahoman*. 18 April 1937.

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Planned from the beginning to be the centerpiece of the Civic Center project, the Municipal Building is the lynchpin to the designed environment that would be constructed in place of the noisy, dirty rail yards.

The Municipal Building is architecturally significant within Oklahoma City as an excellent example of an Art Deco style public building, specifically a unique sub-category referred to as "PWA Deco" which combines Art Deco with Classical elements. The city hall is one of three historic buildings in downtown Oklahoma City known as the Civic Center. All three adhere to the Art Deco style, though the Civic Center Auditorium (now known as the Civic Center Music Hall) has been heavily renovated on the interior in recent years to accommodate growing crowds. From the front, however, the exterior of this building appears the same as when it was constructed. Additionally, the Auditorium is mostly a brick building, unlike the limestone Municipal Building which remains true to its original design. The Municipal Building provides a unique bit of breathing room in the middle of downtown Oklahoma City. Skyscrapers loom not too far in the distance and to the north of the structure lies the new Oklahoma Museum of Art, a building of modern design.

The environs of the Municipal Building constitute a vibrant area. The other Civic Center building besides the Municipal Building and the Music Hall is the Oklahoma County Courthouse). This building, whose architects were the famous Layton and Forsyth, contains much of the same Art Deco and classical elements as the other two buildings.³⁷ This thirteen story building holds a message "Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political-Thomas Jefferson." Made of Bedford limestone, like the Municipal Building, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. The building also presents numerous treasures for the observer with abstracted wagon wheel chandeliers, frieze bands of cow skulls, and numerous other such details. Unity and harmony of design run throughout the Civic Center. Even with different architects for each building, they each adhered to a specific style that makes all three resonate with each other. Many buildings in downtown Oklahoma City, whose major development growth began in the 1920s and continued through the 1930s, adhere to the Art Deco style such as the thirty-three story First National Bank and Trust Company Building built during the same era.

Although the form of the Oklahoma City Municipal Building adheres closely to the Classical Revival style, the building is classified as Art Deco due to the prominent stylization of the ornamentation, the deviation from Classical form, and the reliance on modern, machine-age materials on many exterior elements. The ornamentation is a defining feature of the building because it is the building's dominant visual characteristic both inside and out. The external ornamentation holds particular importance for the people of Oklahoma City. The elegant stylized "sunrise" motifs found around the outside of the building inspired the City's logo, adopted in 2004.³⁸ The combination of Art Deco style ornamentation and a Classical Revival form demonstrates the influence of the PWA. The interior retains its integrity and serves as a beautiful example of the Art Deco style while utilizing seven different kinds of marble to create spectacular designs.

CONCLUSION

The first city hall, used from 1892-1900, was clearly insufficient for its task. In 1900, a new city hall was built, the first building built specifically as a City Hall. The city offices soon outgrew this building. Certainly, the various renovations due to two fires did not aid the building as being a useful place for the seat of the government for the capital city of Oklahoma. Oklahoma City, at this time, grew with no specific or central plan for the city.

³⁷ Ralph Spangler. *Oklahoma City*, 2.

³⁸ City of Oklahoma City. "City Hall."

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The Civic Center was a unique project for Oklahoma City that represented the first comprehensive plan for the city's growth and development.

Overall, the Oklahoma City Municipal Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as part of the centerpiece of the first comprehensive plan for downtown Oklahoma City. Furthermore, the building is representative of the efforts of the PWA to stimulate the local, state and national economies during the Great Depression. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of an Art Deco style public building built in Oklahoma City in the mid-1930s. It is significant as part of a greater, unified component, the Civic Center. Its architectural significance is directly tied to its significance in community planning and is reflective of the style of building favored by the PWA.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Bounded on the west by Walker Avenue, on the north by Couch Drive, on the south by Colcord Drive and on the east by the semi-circular 49er Drive. Includes much of Block 63A, Original Townsite plat.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This included the grounds historically associated with the Oklahoma City Municipal Building, as laid out in the construction plans for the Civic Center.



Oklahoma City Municipal Building

