

A G U I D E T O

Historic Santa Monica City Hall





THE CITY SEAL, MEASURING 79 INCHES IN DIAMETER, WAS CREATED WITH THE SAME "PETRACHROME" METHOD AND A PALETTE OF COLORS, TEXTURES AND ELEMENTS SIMILAR TO THOSE USED IN THE MACDONALD-WRIGHT MURALS. ENCIRCLED BY THE WORDS, "CITY OF SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA. FOUNDED 1875," THE SEAL FEATURES A MERMAID AND SPANISH GALLEON ON THE BAY, WITH SUN, MOUNTAINS, CLOUDS AND AIRPLANES BEHIND.

A RIBBON NEAR THE BASE OF THE SEAL CARRIES THE CITY'S MOTTO, *POPULUS FELIX EN URBE FELICE*, TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN AS "FORTUNATE PEOPLE IN A FORTUNATE LAND."

THE SEAL IS INLAID IN THE CENTER OF THE FOYER FLOOR, SURROUNDED BY COLOR TILES THAT RUN ALONG THE EAST-WEST AXIS OF THE FOYER AND HALLS. A SERRATED PATTERN OF YELLOW TRIANGLES RUNNING AGAINST A BROWN FIELD, BORDERED BY BLACK STRIPES, ECHOES THE CHEVRON PATTERN ON THE TILED WAINSCOTING FOUND NEARBY.

The Overview

With a nautical quality befitting its seaside locale, Santa Monica City Hall reflects the character of its surroundings, making it a civic building truly connected to its constituency. Designed by



two prominent Los Angeles architects, it is recognized as an outstanding example of the Public Works Administration (PWA) *Moderne* style of architecture popularized by Depression-era architects. With original Gladding, McBean ceramic tiles found around

the west entrance doorway and throughout the building, and historic Stanton Macdonald-Wright murals in the entry foyer that document the city's and the state's history, the building's architecture has earned it a place in the California Register of Historical Resources (1996), designation as a city landmark and eligibility for listing in the federal Register of Historic Places.

At the time of its formal dedication on November 24, 1939, speakers at the ceremony touched on the building's social importance by emphasizing its symbolism of democracy, citizenship and civic responsibility. Its completion represented the collective efforts of residents, city leaders and the federal government to overcome the effects of the Great





Depression. That this building has served as the center of the city's civic life for more than 60 years, with much of its original character and architectural integrity still intact, is testament to its broad architectural, social and cultural significance.

Based on the date of original construction and National Register requirements, Santa Monica City Hall's period of significance is defined as 1938-1951. Only those spaces and features that fall within the period of significance and retain their original integrity are considered significant and character-defining. As such, the original building's exterior is significant, as are numerous interior spaces and features.



PWA Moderne Architecture

This style of architecture was most widely used in buildings constructed between 1933 and 1944 by the federal Public Works Administration. The PWA *Moderne* style utilized characteristics of both the Art *Deco* and Art *Moderne* styles. From Art *Deco*, it borrowed geometric and angular ornamentation in low relief, vertical projections and a sense of symmetry. From Art *Moderne*, it took faceted corners, a flat roof, continuous ribbons of windows and a focus on horizontality. PWA *Moderne* became a uniquely distinguished style because of this design mix, but also because it was most often used in projects financed by the federal government.

The primary historic interior areas are the grand entry lobby with high walls, grand stairways and artworks. Character-defining features located on the first floor include the decorative tile wainscots, art murals, metal grilles, terrazzo floors, steel-framed windows, metal lighting fixtures and wood furnishings. Significant interior spaces on the second floor include the Council Chamber at the southwest corner, the original jail cells at the northeast corner and the city manager's office on the east side. Character-defining features here include wood wall paneling, ceramic lavatories, tile floors and wood veneer doors with metal locksets.



C hanges

The first change to the original City Hall occurred when a rose garden was planted in front of the entrance as a memorial to local men killed in war. Dedicated on Armistice Day, 1951, the rose garden still provides a space for remembrance and reflection.



In 1958, a three-story concrete and brick masonry addition was attached to the rear of City Hall. This new building provided space for a police department, an office for the traffic engineer and offices for the recreation department. Since the opening in 2003 of a new public safety facility and relocation of staff, this non-original addition to the historic building has been slated for demolition.

A renovation of the Council Chamber in 1999-2000 added technical upgrades and design changes to enhance meeting participation, but did not disturb the existing, historic finishes of the chamber. Of particular design interest is the crenulated wood detail added to the front of the Council dais which mimics a similar detail found at the exterior roofline of City Hall.

(See photo, page nine.)

Restoration and Preservation

Simultaneous with the completion of a Historic Structure Report, conservation work on the murals in the lobby was completed over a period of several weeks in 2003 by the firm of Rainer, Stavroudis & Zebala. Their work was directed by the city's Cultural Affairs Division as part of a comprehensive project to survey and restore thirteen murals in the city.





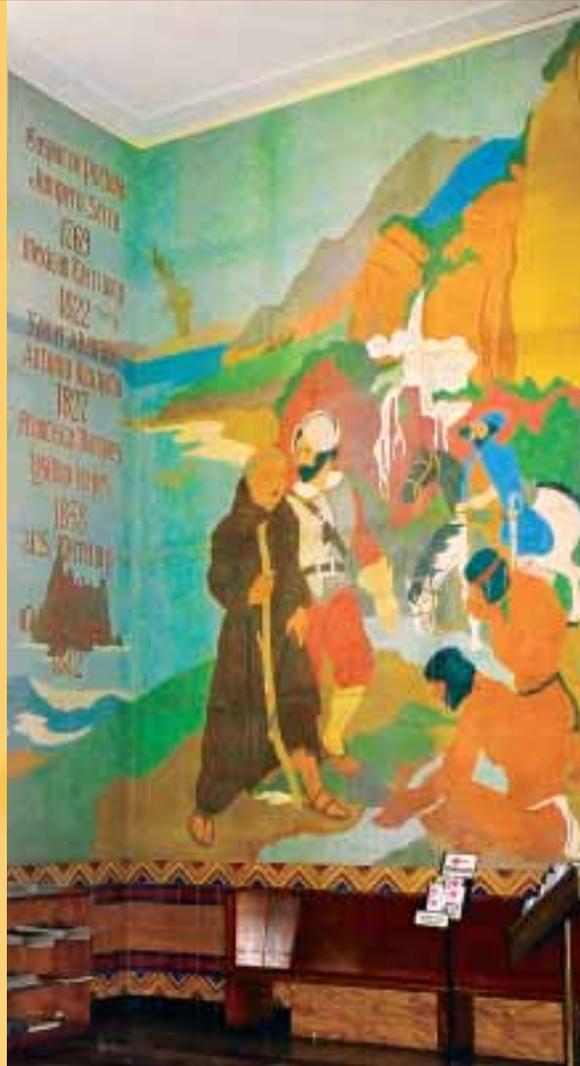
T H E A R C H I T E C T S

AS A YOUNG ARCHITECT, DONALD B. PARKINSON COLLABORATED FIRST WITH HIS FATHER, JOHN PARKINSON AND, LATER, WITH JOSEPH M. ESTEP, TO DESIGN MANY OF LOS ANGELES' MOST ENDURING LANDMARKS. COUNTED AMONG THEM: THE ORIGINAL CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (1919-39), THE LOS ANGELES MEMORIAL COLISEUM (1923 AND 1930-31), LOS ANGELES CITY HALL (1928), BULLOCKS-WILSHIRE (1929) AND UNION STATION (1939). PARKINSON AND ESTEP WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESIGN OF SANTA MONICA CITY HALL, ON WHICH CONSTRUCTION WAS BEGUN IN 1938 AND COMPLETED IN 1939.

The Murals

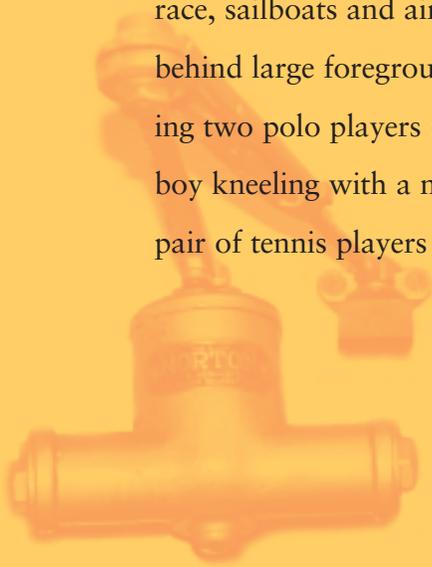
The murals on the north and south walls of the foyer were painted by the renowned American artist Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who spent much of his life in Santa Monica. Using a method he pioneered and called “Petrachrome,” Macdonald-Wright painted the murals with a liquid mixture of materials including crushed tile, marble and granite, then let the work dry before polishing it. This technique soon became popular with local muralists and was nationally recognized as an important contribution to the evolution of the medium.

The mural extending from the west wall onto the north wall depicts a group of five figures meeting on a beach rimmed by mountains, with rocks in the waves at the shoreline. A Spanish conquistador stands with a padre in a Franciscan robe holding a walking stick. They face two Native Americans, kneeling and sitting at a stream, drinking with



their hands. Behind them is a standing, bearded figure who wears a blue hat and cloak, and behind him are two bridled horses. A waterfall is seen in the middle distance, the source of the stream. A bird soars in the sky. A timeline accompanying the mural indicates dates of historic significance for both the city and the state.

The mural extending from the west wall to the south portrays Santa Monica in the 1930s: the cliff-side coastal landscape, with people engaged in recreational pursuits evocative of the locale. A road race, sailboats and airplanes are seen behind large foreground figures, including two polo players (one mounted), a boy kneeling with a model airplane, a pair of tennis players and a dog.



The Tiles

THE BRILLIANTLY COLORED TILES THAT SURROUND THE EXTERIOR OF THE FRONT ENTRANCE TO CITY HALL AND DECORATE ITS INTERIOR WERE CRAFTED BY THE CALIFORNIA-BASED GLADDING, McBEAN TILE COMPANY, NOW THE ONLY REMAINING MAJOR MANUFACTURER OF HAND-SCULPTED, ORNAMENTAL TERRA COTTA IN THE UNITED STATES. IN CONTINUOUS OPERATION SINCE 1875, GLADDING McBEAN'S REPUTATION FOR QUALITY CRAFTSMANSHIP WAS SUCH THAT, IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, ITS TERRA COTTA ORNAMENTATION AND WALL TILES WERE INTEGRATED INTO NUMEROUS MAJOR PUBLIC BUILDINGS, INCLUDING THE WRIGLEY BUILDING IN CHICAGO, THE WARNER THEATER IN WASHINGTON, D.C., CARNEGIE HALL IN NEW YORK CITY, AND THE BULLOCK'S-WILSHIRE DEPARTMENT STORE, UNION STATION AND LOS ANGELES CITY HALL.

AT THE TIME OF THE TILE INSTALLATION AT SANTA MONICA CITY HALL, GLADDING, McBEAN WAS BASED HERE, ALTHOUGH IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE TILES THEMSELVES WERE ACTUALLY MADE AT THE GLADDING, McBEAN PLANT IN GLENDALE.





THE TILES ARE VARIOUSLY GLAZED IN MULTIPLE COLORS, INCLUDING BLACK, BEIGE, OCHRE, BLUE, BROWN, CREAM AND REDDISH BROWN, TO FORM EITHER A SINGLE FIELD OF COLOR OR A BOLD GEOMETRIC DESIGN. THEIR PRESENCE ADDS TO THE CHARACTER AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUILDING BY PROVIDING RARE AND UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF ARTISTIC CREATION— AND THEY ARE TANGIBLE PIECES OF A RENOWNED COMPANY THAT SHAPED THE MODERN CERAMICS INDUSTRY.



The Getty / "Preserve L.A."

This guide was produced as part of a \$70,000 "Preserve L.A." grant to the City of Santa Monica from the Getty to research, document and help conserve the historic and architectural elements of Santa Monica City Hall. Using the research and analysis contained in the Historic Structure Report prepared by Historic Resources Group, LLC, the guide is intended to help visitors to City Hall recognize and appreciate the numerous features of the building that have historic, cultural and architectural significance in terms of both community and era.

Funding a diverse range of projects, the Getty's grant program provides critical support to institutions and individuals worldwide that promote learning and scholarship about the history of the visual arts and the conservation of cultural heritage. Since its inception in 1984, the Getty Grant Program has supported over 3,000 projects in more than 150 countries. "Preserve L.A." was a three-year initiative to provide much-needed financial support to Los Angeles County non-profit, charitable and government organizations for the proper planning and conservation of historical buildings and sites, thus preserving the cultural heritage and history of local communities for future generations.



The City of Santa Monica is grateful to the Getty for its financial support of this important effort to ensure the preservation of City Hall.