United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms Type all entries—complete applicable sections RECENTED 1983 Name APE Oakland City Hall OHP historic , Oakland City Hall and/or common Location 1421 Washington Street N/A not for publication street & number Oakland N/A vicinity of 8 congressional district city, town California 06 Alameda code 001 state code county Classification 3. Status Category **Ownership Present Use** X public X occupied district agriculture museum building(s) private unoccupied commercial park structure both work in progress educational _ private residence . site **Public Acquisition** Accessible entertainment religious x yes: restricted _ object in process government scientlfic being considered __ yes: unrestricted industrial transportation X N/A military other: no **Owner of Property** City of Oakland name 1421 Washington Street street & number N/A_vicinity of Oakland California 94612 state city, town Location of Legal Description 5. Alameda County Recorder, County Courthouse courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. 1225 Fallon Street street & number Oakland state California 94612 city, town **Representation in Existing Surveys** 6. State Historic Resources Inventory has this property been determined elegible? \underline{X} no title 1981-82 date federal county <u>X</u> local state

depository for survey records State Office of Historic Preservation Department of Parks & Recreation

city, town

Sacramento

state California 95811

7. Description

Condition	Check one	Check one	N/A
excellent () (A deteriorated	unaitered	original site	
X goodruins	_X_ altered	moved date	
fair unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Oakland's City Hall, located in the center of downtown Oakland, occupies an entire city block on the westerly side of Washington Street between 14th and 15th Streets opposite Memorial Plaza (commonly called City Hall Plaza). Designed in the American Beaux-Arts style by the New York firm of Palmer and Hornbostel and constructed 1911-1914, its composition consists of a three-part, vertical design with a monumental three-story base, approximately 56' in height with 184' frontage (on Washington Street) and 124' in depth above which a ten-story tower, approximately 161' in height³, 103' in width and 68' in depth, is surmounted by a cupola with a four-faced clock tower rising to a height of approximately 343' above the sidewalk⁴. The massing of the structure clearly separates the customary ceremonial rooms of the base from the office tower containing various departments of city administration. The main facade is dominated by a slightly projecting, columned entry portico, flanked by matching side wings; the surface is faced with California granite and highlighted by dull glazed terra cotta details depicting a combination of classical and California motifs; tall recessed window bays terminate in arches at the third-story of the base and the eleventh story of the shaft; the foundation consists of a solid slab of concrete and steel, two feet six inches thick, underlying the entire structure³. Although the building has experienced many interior modifications and alterations, it retains its basic integrity.

The portico is flanked by two giant freestanding, fluted granite columns (on octagonal bases and headed by composite capitals molded in terra cotta), immediately behind which glass doors are framed by a bronze and glass entry screen, designed in a geometrical pattern,which is repeated at the side entrances. The portico is approached by three low granite steps flanked by granite piers supporting terra cotta lanterns embellished with an abundance of California fruits (see photo). At the two front corners (Washington Street at 14th and 15th Streets), matching terra cotta lanterns on granite pedestals are attached to heavy (Continued)

Architect's drawings show height to be 70.83', which includes basement, approximately 15'. See front and side elevations.

Architect's drawings show depth of approximately 147', which includes a projection at rear of the building. See side elevation.

Height of tower includes the upper portion of vestibule, rotunda and Council Chamber, comprising the dome, also the Mezzanine area at sides of dome. Actual height of office tower is approximately 128'. See front and side elevations.

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Height from sidewalk to apex of tower. See front and side elevations.

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The Oakland Tribune, October 10, 1911, reported "This is not to be found in any other building in America".

8. Significance



Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Oakland's City Hall, the fifth in the history of the City, has historical significance as the first City Hall in the United States to combine the ceremonial aspect of government with the modern high-rise office tower. It is contemporary with the Woolworth Building, New York City (1911-1913), designed by Cass Gilbert, who in fact, received an honorary prize in the nationwide competition for the design of Oakland City Hall. Its architectural merit includes the siting and form, the arrangement of the ceremonial spaces and the materials and vigor of the decorative details, especially the design of the terra cotta including the large ornamental torches and the first floor frieze. The Council Chamber (redecorated 1957) is a handsome room, and the vestibule and rotunda leading to it are excellent examples of the American Beaux-Arts style. (Architecture) President William Howard Taft was the principal speaker at the ceremony held for laying the cornerstone in 1911. Hiram Johnson and other dignitaries were guests. The late Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Earl Warren, briefly occupied an office there in 1920. During its long history, many famous persons have visited there. (Government) Once the tallest building in Oakland (the huge electric clock in the cupola was thrust into the sky higher than any other building in California or any public building west of the Rockies), many structures now tower above it, but it still dominates, at close range, its central urban space.

The construction of Oakland's present City Hall, preceded by four other City Halls, culminated years of effort on the part of many Oakland citizens and officials. The first City Hall (1852-67), located at the Edson Adams Building on Main Street (now Broadway) between 3rd and 4th Streets, was rented. The second City Hall (1867-71) occupied the second floor of Shattuck Hall, a brick building at 8th and Broadway erected by Ex-Mayor William Shattuck and Frank Hillegass. The third City Hall, and the first to be owned by the City (constructed 1867-71), was intended to become permanent headquarters, although at the time many citizens protested that its location (on 14th Street facing south along the axis of Washington Street) was too far out into the country to the north of town. The City purchased the tract of land for \$17,000 and an architect named Bugbee was eventually selected as the designer. Almost \$70,000 was spent on construction, which resulted in an imposing three-story woodframe edifice topped with a mansard roof and a cupola containing a clock. This landmark, then considered the ultimate in architecture, was destroyed by fire on August 25, 1877, but was soon replaced by a newly consructed frame building, somewhat less pretentious than its predecessor, designed by local architects Thomas and John J. Newsom (Newsom Brothers) and built on the same site and the same foundation.

In 1905, because of mounting agitation for a new City Hall to reflect Oakland's prosperity a newly elected Mayor Frank K. Mott fulfilled a campaign promise to work for its realization. A bond issue for \$1,150,000 was passed, and a Board of Public Works (compromised of Frank K. Mott, Mayor; John W. Stetson, City Attorney and Frederick C. Turner, Engineer) (Continued)

Final expenditures for construction totaled nearly \$2,000,000.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Oakland City Hall, the Pro Historical Significance The Oakland Tribune, June May 2, 1911.	of the Building, Off	fice of the City	Architect, Jo	ohn Papadakis
B <u>lueprints</u> , Horizontal and	Longitudinal Section	ons. Oakland Cit	y Hall by Palı	<u>mer & Hornboste</u> l
10. Geographic				×
Acreage of nominated property	pproximately 0.8 of	an acre		
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11. Form Prepa	ared By			
name/title Katharine Ol	lson			
organization City Plannin	ng Department	date Ma	arch 28, 1983	
street & number Oakland City	7 Hall, 1421 Washing	telephone	(415) 273-394	1
City or town		state Ca	alifornia	
12. State Histo	oric Preserva	tion Offic	er Certi	fication
The evaluated significance of this	property within the state is:			
national	state loc	al		
As the designated State Historic Pi 665), I hereby nominate this proper according to the criteria and proce State Historic Preservation Officer	ty for inclusion in the Natio dures set forth by the Herita	nal Register and certi	fy that it has been o	evaluated
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	eservation Officer		date ^{AUG} s	9 1983
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bronze, spike-like railings which abut the sidewalk above depressed light wells. Both side entrances (14th and 15th Streets) are flanked by bronze lanterns (see photo) attached to the railing in similar manner. The rear corners of the building are defined by matching bronze lanterns also attached to the railing. The 14th Street entrance has been slightly modified to provide a ramp for use by handicapped persons.

The side wings are articulated by a series of three-story recessed bays alternating with giant pilasters, having capitals which match those of the freestanding columns in the portico; each wing contains three bays and four pilasters across the front, seven bays and eight pilasters across the side (with the fourth or central bay interrupted by a side entrance at the first floor level, see photo). The relief pattern of the pilaster captials directly beneath the architrave, is continous around the corners of the building and the main entrance. Between the first and second stories, the building is encompassed by a terra cotta frieze (interrupted by the pilasters and entrances) depicting typical California fruits -- grapes, olives and figs and effectively separating the heavy, unadorned granite exterior treatment of the first floor from a highly ornate facade of the second and third stories. At the first floor level, each bay contains paired casement windows (with transoms) flanked by granite piers. At the second and third story levels, each bay contains three windows with rectangular transoms at the second floor and arched transoms (terminating the bays) at the third floor. Each window pane is flanked by ornate pilasters and entirely outlined with terra cotta decor. Between the second and third story windows, spandrels contain terra cotta panels portraying classical motifs. To outline the side entrances, terra cotta borders depict ribbon-like elements with rosettes and a border with a spindle pattern.

Completing the entablature, the architrave supports a heavy cornice and an ornate rail, entirely clad in terra cotta. Incorporated in the design of that rail (over the central portico), a pair of American eagles peers out over Washington Street. The American flag is flown from a pole mounted on an overhead structure above (see photo). Other flagpoles, mounted directly behind the railing on the side wings (at the same level as the eagles), accommodate the flags of the State of California and the City of Oakland.

Above the base, a transitional area (approximate in form to that of a Greek cross), houses the upper areas of the vestibule, the rotunda and the Council Chamber and is flanked by a deck. These spaces are illuminated by three steel-paneled, semi-circular windows (thirty feet in diameter) over the portico and at opposite sides of the shaft; also by similarlypaneled smaller semi-circular windows located on the sides of the portico projection, on the front of the shaft (flanking that projection) and the sides of the shaft (flanking the larger windows). The rear projection, occupied by the Council Chamber, is illuminated by three such windows on each side. Below the Council Chamber, at ground level, a garage opening is entered from 14th and 15th Streets. Above this transitional area, a row of small casement windows, enunciated by two belt courses, is spaced so as to conform with the bays of the overhead tower.

The design of the office tower is a simplified version of the base design. All bays (seven on the front and rear facades, five on each side) are arched at the eleventh floor level. Between the fourth and tenth floors, each bay contains paired casement

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windows with transoms, each pane outlined with a ribbon-like terra cotta pattern (except for the two bays, second from each end on the front facade, which house the elevator shafts, see photo). Between stories, spandrels are filled with terra cotta panels, depicting patterns of California wheats that are slightly less ornate than those of the base. No terra cotta trim is used on the two bays (housing the elevator shafts), which contain paired glass panels at each level with two smaller panels between stories. Granite pillars emulate the giant pilasters (terminating with simple imposts rather than ornate capitals) between the bays. The arched windows of the eleventh floor are outlined by granite masonry (extrados) connecting the imposts. Over the apex of each arch (formed by the bays), at the twelfth story level, there is a single narrow, barred prison opening. At the thirteenth story level, the architrave is accented by a series of square reveals, faced with terra cotta (four reveals at the corners of the tower, fourteen on both front and rear facades, and ten on each side). The overhead cornice (clad in terra cotta and displaying decorative motifs, including dentils and rosettes) is attached to a perforated rail above, which encloses another rooftop deck.

At the fourteenth and fifteenth floor levels, another transitional area (smaller and rectangular) is accented by a fifteenth floor projection, causing the upper facade to extend beyond the lower one. At this level, a series of decorative terra cotta grills over enframed glass (seven on both front and rear, three on each side), are bordered by two belt courses. The four corners are accented by a slight projection of the masonry having terra cotta bosses inserted within each projection (a total of eight), intended to simulate repetition of the grill openings. The sixteenth floor elevation (taller and narrower than the rectangle below) evolves in a generally octagonal form with four walls parallel to those of the rectangle and connecting walls concave (see photo). The tower, from a surrounding deck, may be entered through arched entrances (two), outlined by masonry (including extrados, imposts and keystone).

The surmounting clock tower is octagonal in form. Above the sixteenth floor elevation, a decorative terra cotta cornice is superimposed by pairs of decorative terra cotta brackets (at front, rear and sides), which appear to support balconies enclosed by classical balustrades. Behind each of these balconies (seventeenth story), there is a classical archedniche enframed by masonry (with imposts, extrados and keystone) and flanked by fluted columns of the Ionic order (a total of eight). At the corners of the arches, abutments are highlighted with terra cotta motifs. Above each niche (eighteenth floor), a clock face is flanked by volute buttresses with a torch mounted upon each (a total of eight). The octagon is surmounted by a rounded, crown-like structure which completes the composition. A flagpole,formerly mounted at the apex, was removed in 1956, because a lattice-work spire had rusted. Since then flags have been mounted from the balcony below.

From Washington Street, the building is entered through a double pair of swinging glass doors (replacing earlier revolving doors) into a vaulted vestibule, sixty-six feet in height. From this area, the central dome of the rotunda, eight feet above, is visible. Lighting consists of a central fixture in the form of a sphere, five feet in diameter, studded with incandescent lamps very closely set, intended to represent the "Sun". Suspended above, there is a bronze ring, about eight feet in diameter. Upon its lower side, figures represent the various planets. Twelve electric lanterns, on the top side, have one of the signs of the Zodiac painted upon the face of each globe. Images, intended to create an astronomical effect, are projected upon the dome. (Continued)

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The grand central staircase, in marble and terra cotta, sixteen feet wide at the vestibule level, is divided between the second and third floors and joined again at the third level landing. The original brass hand rails, carried on wrought iron goosenecks, have since been replaced by freestanding chrome rails to accommodate the handicapped. The rotunda is flanked by Doric ^{columns} and lighted by six semi-circular windows (see exterior description). The vestibule, stairs and rotunda are finished in imitation limestone, jointed, tooled and carved.

Twenty feet from the top of the stairs, a pair of paneled doors open into the City Council Chamber, (redecorated 1957) a room sixty-four feet by forty feet with a barrel vaulted ceiling, forty feet high. Six large windows in cross vaults penetrate the main vault to provide illumination. The main vault is flanked by arches with a pair of Doric columns, painted in silver gilt. The ceiling is designed with openings backed by recessed surfaces for accoustical control. An elaborately designed lighting system, consisted of suspended clusters of light bulbs in ornately designed fixtures and controlled by dimmer relays, has been replaced by a more modern lighting installation.

The mayor's office consists of a suite of rooms, the innermost paneled with a wood wainscot and having a ceiling of wood beams and panels. Stenciled figures, representing the days of the week, and shields bearing drawings of an oak tree, once adorned it. This decor has been covered. A marble fireplace was covered in 1957. A window, converted to a picture window, has broken an otherwise harmonious composition at the third floor level. (See photo, third floor window, lefthand corner). It may be possible that this alteration could be restored to its original state.

There have been many interior modifications and alterations to City Hall in the ensuing years of its existence. These are relatively minor in terms of overall integrity of the structure. The building, originally intended to house all departments of City government, was soon outgrown. An Emergency Hospital on the twelfth floor was soon abandoned as impractical, because the elevator leading to it was too small to carry a stretcher.

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organized an Architectural Competition for the selection of a design. John Galen Howard (Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and head of the Department of Architecture, University of California) was engaged by the Board as its Architectural Advisor in preparation of a Program, conduct of a Competition and in the making of Awards. Invitations to submit designs (for which each was to be paid \$1,000) were sent to three firms:

> McKim, Mead & White, New York City Peabody & Stearns, Boston Cass Gilbert Co., New York City

The competition was also open to a maximum of twenty-five additional architects with ability and experience that would justify the Board in considering their eligibility and extending invitations. Ten additional \$1,000 prizes were offered with a proviso that at least two of those prizes be awarded to local architects.² A jury of seven (including the three Board Members, the Advisor and three architects chosen by the competitors -- Williams S. Eames, Architect, St. Louis; E.F. Champrey, Architect, Seattle; and Professor Warren P. Laird, Pennsylvania) was selected to judge the Competition.

The wining design, selected by the jury, was that of Palmer and Hornbostel, New York City. An honorary prize was received by Cass Gilbert & Co. The winning firm had already gained notice in architectural competition in California. They placed first among designs submitted by American firms in the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Competition for a Plan for the University of California (1898-99). Their previous work included the design of the Williamsburg and Queensboro bridges, New York City; Carnegie Technical Schools, University of Pittsburg; the New York State Education Building, Albany, New York; the Soldiers Memorial Auditorium, Pittsburg; and the Northwestern University buildings in Evanston, Illinois.

The architect was asked to advise the Board in taking bids, awarding contracts and supervision of construction. Specifications called for twenty-seven separate sub-contracts, the majority of which were awarded to California firms. The minimum wage set for each day's labor was \$2.00. Specifications for construction materials called for marble similar to that quarried at Columbia, Tuolumne County, California, known as San Francisco "Portola" (for most surfaces) and known as "Dark Blue" or "Verde Antique" (for floor borders); first quality hard burned brick in regular bond; architectural terra cotta from a hard burned fire clay with full hard glaze, matte surface; all granite work of equal quality and color; granolithic sidewalks and curbs; interior cabinet work in best quality Coast Mahogany selected for grain and color; plate glass for clock dials from a single sheet, one inch thick, "silver ripple" or granite "prismatic Imperial Plate Glass Ornament" made by Pressed Prism Plate Glass, Morgantown, West Virginia and every detail imaginable. To accomplish the task, an allowance of forty cents per cubic foot was established by the program for a building to be of "practical but not extravagant arrangements, fireproof throughout". (Continued)

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Nevertheless, the Oakland Tribune had protested that the Competition terms had favored Eastern architects. Their opinion was that John Galen Howard had devised the conditions of the contest and the selection of competitors in such a manner that the selection of an Eastern architect would be inevitable. June 24, 1910.

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Horses, scrapers and wagons were used in the excavation. Mayor Mott dumped the first wheelbarrow of cement at the site on July 7, 1911. In August, President William Howard Taft was invited to attend the ceremonies for laying the Cornerstone on October 12 (Columbus Day), 1911. Governor Hiram Johnson, former Governor George C. Pardee, former Governor James Gilett, U.S. Senator George C. Perkins, members of the committee, Officers from naval vessels stationed in the Bay, former Secretary of the Navy Victor H. Metcalf and Representatives of the Grand Lodge of Masons of California also attended the ceremonies. Edson Adams, Chairman of the Reception Committee and Mayor Mott received the President at the Key Route Inn (22nd and Broadway), after which a parade traveled to the site. Following a prayer and singing, a silver trowel was presented to Grand Master, A.J. Munro. The casket, containing many articles of national and local interest, was sealed and the upper stone of rough ashlar lowered until level, squared and plumbed. This exercise closed with an invocation when oil, corn and wine, emblematic of wages paid to craftsmen in the days of King Solomon, were poured over the massive block of granite, weighing seven and one-half tons. President Taft then gave his address, followed by a parade through the City, which ended at the wharf, where the President departed for San Francisco to dedicate the Panama Pacific Exposition. The Roman numerals, MCMXI, are engraved in granite at the corner of Washington and 15th Streets.

As the center of City administration, City Hall has been visited by many famous people including former Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, Governor Ronald Reagan (now President), former Vice-President Walter Mondale, Prince Charles and Billy Graham. The late chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court Earl Warren occupied an office in the building in 1920 before moving to the Old Courthouse as the Assistant District Attorney of Alameda County.

The building was originally intended to accommodate virtually all functions of the municipagovernment. As Oakland grew and governmental needs increased, available space became inadequate and expansion into other facilities took place. The Fire Department moved out in 1946, including the City's main fire station which occupied an area at the back of the building now used as a freight loading dock. This meant that basement sleeping quarters for firemen who were assigned to this station could be vacated and used for other purposes. In the next few years the Police Department also left the building. Eventually a new Hall of Justice was completed in 1963 at 7th and Broadway, and the new building provided spaces for the Police, for Municipal Courts formerly housed in City Hall, and for the jail. The old, now vacant jail space on the uppermost floors of City Hall is used for storage; without very expensive alterations, including bringing additional elevator service to these floors, the area cannot be used for other purposes. The metal cell bars have been removed, as well as furniture and plumbing fixtures, but otherwise the jail space remains largely as it once was, an eerie reminder of the past.

Additional vacating of the building in the future is possible. The structure does not meet present day seismic safety standards and has been found to be hazardous. In addition, the office floors above the third level are inadequately provided with emergency exits and stairways. One possibility is to retain the ceremonial chambers and offices of major officials on the first three floors, while keeping the remainder of the structure above

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only partially occupied or even vacant.

Regardless of these considerations, it is almost certain to be preserved for future generations as a symbol of the great city of which it is the center of public life. Once it was the tallest building in the City -- seen by citizens from miles away.

Today, while Downtown Oakland contains many structures towering above it, City Hall is separate and stands alone in the skyline. A picture of City Hall is found on the City's official seal. Oakland's identity is closely linked with this distinguished building.

City Hall has been and will continue to be a recognizable and inspirational image to all the municipal population.

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Geographical					
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thence southerly parallel with said line of Washington Street 208 feet to the northern line of 14th Street; thence easterly 170 feet to point of beginning. Boundaries are drawn on the historic lot lines of the building.

