

## City Hall



When South San Francisco was incorporated in 1908, the City Trustees – Harry Edwards, Thomas Hickey, Daniel McSweeney, Herman Gaerdes and first Mayor Andre Hynding – met at the temporary City Hall at 310 Linden Avenue and, for years, discussed a more befitting and permanent structure. The City finally purchased the Civic Center site in 1913 for \$10,000 from the South San Francisco Land and Improvement Company. This property had been marked for nineteen prime home sites.

### Financing City Hall

In 1917, a committee was formed of five prominent men in the community to study the means for financing a City Hall. Those men were Fred Cunningham, George Wallace, Dr. J.C. McGovern, A.P. Scott and W.H. Coffinberry. This committee toured California for a fitting example, but their trip was unsuccessful. They then decided to call for a Response for Proposals inviting architects to submit designs, with Werner and Coffey of San Francisco being selected. They submitted drawings of a structure modeled after Philadelphia's Independence Hall, a neo-colonial Georgian structure.

### Post War Construction

On June 10, 1919, the voters approved, by a 4-to-1 majority, a \$129,000 bond issue which included the construction of City Hall and the extension of sewer lines to the Industrial area. However, because of post World War I inflation, the construction was delayed. The conservative city fathers, who patiently waited for prices to drop, finally awarded the construction contract to Larsen-Sampson Company.

### Total Cost

The new City Hall, located at 400 Grand Avenue, was completed in 1920 at a cost of \$125,000. On November 11, 1920, thousands turned out in the rain to view a grand Armistice Day parade and their beautiful new City Hall. The festivities included a Women's Club luncheon reception, a dance held by the American Legion, a muddy South San Francisco/San Mateo High football game and a speech by newly

elected Congressman Arthur M. Free.

## Decorations

The flag poles at City Hall and the Carnegie Library next door were donated by the American Legion and dedicated on July 4, 1923. In 1929, the South San Francisco Women's Club erected a fountain on the grounds to the left of City Hall in memory of Marianne Martin who founded the club in 1914. In 1937, the Italian-American Citizens' Club donated a marble bust of George Washington that is located on the front lawn and represents the club's belief in the principles of democracy.

## City Departments in City Hall

While much of the interior of the City Hall has been altered over the years, very little of the exterior has been changed. This building has housed most city departments at one time or another and the municipal and superior courts as well as the City Council chambers were once located on the upper floor. In the early days, the Police Department occupied three rooms on the main floor, including one for the jail. The Fire Department was housed in the basement and included the living quarters and garage for the engine. City Hall was remodeled between 1949 and 1953. In 1949, the Police and Fire Departments moved out of City Hall into their own new quarters.

The paneled conference room and City Manager's office on the second floor were part of a 1960's renovation. It was also in the 1960's that a campaign was launched to have a new City Hall constructed but, because of major protests from residents, the plan was abandoned.

## Remodeling

In the 1980's, City Hall, still the center of civic activities and the focal point of downtown, needed exterior repairs for the gradual deterioration of the years and an interior remodel to accommodate the expansion of City offices. Due to the cost and complexity of the City Hall update, the project was undertaken in three phases. Phase I was the completion of the City Hall Annex to house several City functions. Phase II was the floor plan alteration and the interior remodel of the City Hall building. Phase III was the reconstruction of the cupola, the rounded vault that crowns the building. These three phases were completed in October of 1988 and the newly renovated cupola was dedicated on November 4, 1988.

The City Hall structure was designated Historic Resource No. 1 by the South San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission on July 31, 1986.

## Seismic Retrofit

In the mid 1990's, it was determined that the building was not adequate to keep the building from collapsing in a major earthquake. Therefore, a seismic retrofit of the entire structure was started in October 1997 and completed December 1998. Along with this extensive project, there was remodeling and relocating of some offices. Offices currently housed in the City Hall are City Council, City Manager, Economic and Community Development, Public Works, City Clerk, City Attorney, Community Outreach,

Human Resources and Finance.

### **Media Importance**

The South San Francisco City Hall has been the subject of many magazine articles, appeared on the covers of local telephone books, used as background for several movies and the topic of endless newspaper features since it was dedicated in 1920. The history and beauty of this architectural gem will always be a source of pride for the citizens of South San Francisco.