

ANCHORAGE'S HISTORIC CITY HALL

Anchorage's City Hall was the first of the era's concrete edifices to be constructed. Designed by E. Ellsworth Sedille, a resident architect, it was a marvelous addition to Fourth Avenue in the fall of 1936. "The building is unique for Alaskan construction in the combined use of floor tile, acoustic ceilings, linoleum flooring ... steel sash, stenciled ceilings, indirect lighting, birch door and fireproof construction," said Henry Wolff, engineer for the Public Works Administration (PWA). It was built for \$75,000, nearly half of which was paid for by the PWA. The contractor was Gastineau Construction Co. The details of the building, though made of concrete, retain elements of classical architecture. Examples are the dentils of the cornices, the simulated rustication of the exterior walls and the circular arched entrance.



The building is significant for two reasons – as a symbol of local government and as part of the city's architectural heritage. City Hall is the counterpart of what the old courthouse is to the counties in the Lower 48; it represents the center of governmental affairs. During the early years of its use, nearly every operation of the City was provided office space. In 1936, the City Hall included the Mayor's office, the Clerk's office, the telephone switchboard, the



City Council Chambers, the Police Chief's office, the City Engineer's office, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Utilities, the library, three jail cells, a "tank room" for overnight drunks, a caretaker's apartment and firemen's quarters. Following City and Borough consolidation, City Hall became the administrative headquarters for the Municipality.

The building was leased to Alaska Pacific Bank Corp. in 1980. The interior was remodeled as a 1930s-era bank and office space. This well-done remodeling won a National Trust for Historic Preservation Honor Award for Alaska Pacific Bank.



Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau
524 W. Fourth Ave • Anchorage, AK 99501-2212
(907) 276-4118 • Fax: (907) 278-5559
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HISTORIC CITY HALL TIMELINE

1914 – The Alaska Railroad Act is passed. The federal government chooses Anchorage as the location for its railroad headquarters.

July 10, 1915 – The Alaska Engineering Commission, which was formed with the express purpose of building the railroad, auctioned lots to the residents currently living in unsafe conditions in “Tent City.”

1920 – The City of Anchorage is incorporated.

1935 – Mayor O.S. Gill called a meeting of the City Council (same as our Municipal Assembly now) to pass the placement of a \$75,000 bond on the ballot for construction of a new city hall. The bond passed. Anchorage had approximately 4,000 residents.

1936 – Construction begins with contractor Gastineau Construction Co. The architect was E. Ellsworth Sedille of Anchorage. He chose classic elements to create an imposing, dignified structure, including rustications, pediments, cornices, arched doorways and fan windows.

Mayor H. E. Brown is the first mayor to work in City Hall. In all, 17 mayors were officed in the building.

1979 – Anchorage population is approximately 200,000.

Municipality administrative offices move from City Hall to Hill Building.

1980 – Alaska Pacific Bank took over the building, renovating it to use as its downtown bank branch and provide offices for civic organizations.

Spring 1995 – AHPI, Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB) and the Municipality of Anchorage begin negotiations for the rehabilitation of Old City Hall.

August 1995 – AHPI signs historic preservation easement, ensuring the historic integrity of façade and some interior elements.

September 1995 – Work begins!

March 1996 – ACVB moves into new home.

May 1996 – Exterior renovation completed.

