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Syracuse City Hall
Washington Street
Syracuse
Onondaga County
New York

HABS No. NY-379

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

Name and Location

Syracuse City Hall is the original and present name of the structure.

The address is City Hall, Syracuse, New York. Syracuse City Hall faces south on Washington Street and occupies its own block, bounded by Montgomery Street on the west, Water Street on the north, and Market Street on the east.

The City of Syracuse is the present owner of the building, which houses various municipal offices for City government.

Significance

The site of Syracuse City Hall has been the center of Syracuse's municipal government since 1846. At that time municipal offices were housed in a portion of the old "Market Hall" (circa 1845). The building was later converted solely to municipal use and was eventually demolished in 1889 to allow for erection of the present structure.

Syracuse City Hall is executed in the Romanesque revival style popularized through the works of H. H. Richardson. Its rusticated stone masonry, arcaded main entry, steep hip roof, gabled turrets and striking tower provide a strong visual identity for the building. Its architectural character and detail provide perhaps the best example of a major public building executed in the Romanesque style in this region. City Hall's long association with local government and the decisions which have shaped the character of Syracuse, provide the structure with a unique historic and symbolic significance.

Syracuse City Hall is listed as a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. It was 40 years after the adoption of the City Charter in 1848, that Mayor William B. Kirk called for a new and substantial City Hall in his inaugural address. That day was January 3, 1888. A nonpartisan City Hall Commission was appointed by the Mayor and legislation enacted for a "new City Hall and Central Police Station for the City of Syracuse." In March, 1888, Republican State Senator Francis Hendricks of Syracuse introduced a bill in Albany authorizing Syracuse to finance the construction of a new City Hall by the sale of \$200,000 (later \$300,000) in 20-year bonds at three per cent. The measure passed and on May 8, 1888, Governor Hill of New York approved the committee appropriation to fund \$250,000, and a limit, exclusive of furnishings, was set at \$300,000. The local bonding resolution for financing the construction of City Hall was approved by the Syracuse Common Council on June 17, 1889. In November of 1889 the first cornerstone was laid. Two and a half years after construction began, the new City Hall was officially opened on April 30, 1892 under the tenure of Mayor William Cowie. It has served as the administrative headquarters for City Government since that time.
2. Charles Erastus Colton, a native Syracusan, was unanimously chosen by the nonpartisan commission as architect, on June 11, 1888, and his plans for a building measuring two hundred and four feet by seventy-eight feet overall were accepted on April 2, 1889. Mr. Colton studied in the offices of Archimedes Russell from 1875-78. Headlines in the Syracuse Evening News of March 11, 1892, proclaim: "The New City Hall will soon be ready for its waiting tenants - worth the money it cost." The article's recital of the steps taken by the City Hall Commission identifies Charles Colton as the Architect for City Hall which was erected A.D. 1889-1892.
3. The contract for construction of the New City Hall was let on June 7, 1889, to Hughes Brothers of Syracuse for the sum of \$238,750. The plumbing and ventilation was sublet to Edward Joy (a firm which is still in business in Syracuse); the carpentry work to Thomas Jackson, and the painting to Alfred Friend, and upon his death to his son. Col. J. W. Jackson secured the contract for decoration.

Finding that the appropriation exceeded the cost of construction, the Commissioners substituted tiling and marble wainscoting instead of oak in the Main hall and other prominent areas. They also constructed a sewer from the Water Street entrance through Montgomery Street to the city sewer on Fayette Street at a total cost of \$1,098.50.

The original contract did not include the two elevators, which were supplied by the Howard Iron Works of Buffalo, at a total cost of \$5,000.

Including the subcontracts, marble wainscoting of the main staircase, tiling, French plate glass, extra plumbing, temporary radiation and other improvements not at first contemplated by the commissioners, the total cost of the building was \$298,000.

The exterior walls of the structure are covered with rough cut grey Onondaga limestone, obtained from the nearby town of Oneida. Limestone was considered the most practical material as it would harden in the air and sunshine and was cheaper than the granite which Architect Colton wanted.

4. Syracuse City Hall today retains its original overall dimensions of 78 x 204 feet. The only major alteration to the building's exterior was the closing of the Water Street entrance in 1905 and the replacement of the steps and doors with windows. There have been a number of repairs to the roof over the years but the roofline has not been altered.

The principal interior changes include the conversion of the Police Station to municipal office space in 1905, and the creation of a fifth floor in the front of the building in 1919. The 1977 renovation essentially replaced all mechanical systems in the building but made relatively minor changes in the floor plans.

Many of the original plans for the building's construction, as well as for subsequent repairs, remain intact and are maintained by the City Engineer's Office. For example, the original floor plans are in the City Engineer's Office as are the floor plans for the building both prior and subsequent to the 1977 renovation. Taken together, these three sets of plans trace the changes in floor plans from construction through its present day appearance.

Most of the other original documents which still exist and involve structural or mechanical plans or specifications for repair work are stored in the Engineering Department.

A wealth of non-technical but related material such as newspaper clippings, letters, excerpts from books, photographs and various other materials are on file at the Onondaga Historical Association, which is located two blocks from City Hall.

Several examples of the kinds of materials that are available locally are included in the section on supplementary materials.

5. City Hall has undergone many minor alterations over the years to accommodate the changing needs of city government. Except for minor alterations to exterior fenestration in 1909 and repairs to the roofing in 1918 (including the closing of the skylight) these alterations have been confined to interior space. Until 1977, the general architectural character of the building had not changed substantially, although the placement of new doors, new lighting, lowering of ceilings, installation of window air conditioners, and so forth, had created a degree of contrast between old and new elements of the structure. Interior corridors and stairwells have changed very little, with most interior changes taking place in office space throughout the building. The major renovation of 1977-78 restored most of the historical character of the building while increasing its mechanical efficiency.

The following is a listing of the major interior and exterior alterations which have taken place since 1891:

Exterior

- 1905 - In conjunction with the conversion of the Police Station to municipal office space, the Water Street entrance was closed and the steps and doors were replaced with windows.
- 1909 - Minor alterations to woodwork at northwest entry; minor alterations to window treatment (frames). These changes did not alter the architectural character of the building. Architect: Charles E. Colton.
- 1916 - Minor alterations to roofing materials; all copper gutters removed and replaced by tin; water sheds provided at all turpents and windows, new snow guards; new roofing tiles as needed; skylight removed (east roof) at rear of building. Roofline not altered. Architects: Archimedes Russell and Melvin King.

- 1941 - Roof and tower repairs (new roofing materials). Roofline not altered.
- 1943 - Stone repointing, main tower. No alteration in appearance.
- 1948 - Partial roof replacement (roofing material). No alteration to roofline.
- 1948 - Skylight covering. No alteration to roofline.

Interior

- 1905 - Police station at rear of structure (north end) converted to municipal office space. Firewall separating city departments from police department was pierced in several areas. The change in corridor alignment is still apparent.
- 1917 - New boiler installed (basement).
- 1919 - A large public assembly hall seating 1200 people occupied the front portion of the 4th floor. It was abandoned with the passing of the old primary system and the lost necessity for City and District conventions, and the space converted for office purposes and subdivided into a 4th and 5th floors (it was previously a 2-story space).
- 1937 - New partition in 3rd floor Common Council Chambers. The Chambers were decreased in floor area by one bay and the original wainscot on the south wall was transferred to the new partition.
- 1946 - Remodeling of Mayor's private offices (2nd floor).
- 1948 - City Clerk's office: new partition (2nd floor).
- 1948 - Remodeling of heating and ventilating system.
- 1955 - Mayor's Suite: Rugs and tile floor installed.
- 1969 - Southeast stairwell removed for remodeling of Mayor's Suite and creation of additional office space.
- 1971 - New electric wiring from main panel to major feeder panels on all floors.
- 1977-78 - In the fall of 1977, major renovation work began with a \$3.5 million grant from the Economic Development Administration, secured by Mayor Lee Alexander under Round II of the Local Public Works Act. Local craftsmen, under the guidance of state and federal historic preservation officials, restored the buildings dignity and architectural

1977-78 - flavor of the 19th Century while providing 20th
(contd.) Century mechanical efficiency.

The City Hall project resulted in the replacement of major mechanical systems including heating, ventilating and air conditioning, plumbing, lighting and electric distribution. New items included a fire protection sprinkler system, automatic elevators and reconstructed lavatories with facilities for the handicapped. Windows have been replaced for energy conservation purposes. The exterior of the building, constructed of Onondaga Limestone, has been cleaned.

Throughout the building the original interior and exterior doors have been refurbished and kept intact with overhead fanlight transoms. The building's main corridors have been kept in their original form, including the handsome mosaic tile floor which runs along the 2nd floor corridor.

The Common Council Chambers have been restored to their original beauty and have been updated mechanically for the City Councilors. The original oak-carved ceiling panels and wainscoting have been refinished to a light stain. The oak wainscoting also surrounds the corridors and stairwells near the Council Chambers. The doors and fanlights are original, as are the furnishings within the large meeting room.
Architects: Quinlivan, Pierik & Krause.

B. Historical Context

Syracuse City Hall enjoys a rich tradition of history by virtue of its location and as a result of the use to which the building has been put.

The site of the present City Hall has been the center of local government since 1846. The site adjoins the City's oldest commercial district, Hanover Square, which is one block to the west. Furthermore, the Erie Canal, which played a significant role in the rapid growth of the City's population and commerce and its expanded transportation network, is immediately to the north of the building. The Weighlock Building, an integral part of the Erie Canal during its heyday, is located opposite City Hall and now houses the Canal Museum which provides interpretive programming relative to the canal's role in the early development of Syracuse.

City Hall continues to occupy a strategic site with respect to the City's past and current development. As

such, City Hall was, and remains, strongly tied to the City's economic and social development.

Beyond the historical context which its geographic location confers on City Hall, the very use to which the building has been put generates yet another measure of historic significance. City Hall's association with local government and the decisions which have shaped the character of Syracuse provide the structure with a unique historic and symbolic significance. The building still serves as the administrative headquarters for City government and the decisions made within its walls continue to shape the City's future.

Part II. Architectural Information

A. Description of Exterior

Syracuse City Hall currently has five stories in the front section of the Building and four stories in the rear section. The exterior wall construction is of gray Onondaga limestone with masonry load bearing walls. The stone is rough cut, executed in a rusticated style. The roof is a steep pitched hip type with gabled turrets and dormers. There is one main tower on the south elevation rising to 165 feet. The roof covering (other than the flashing and gutters) is red asbestos composition shingle. Gabled turrets exist at three corners (excepting the main tower at the southwest corner). Two dormers each exist on the last and west elevations; one dormer each at the north and south (main entry) elevations. Minor towers are found on the east and west elevations as well.

There is one arched entry porch at the main entrance to the building (south elevation). There are two chimneys: one central to the rear roof structure; one at the southeast corner of the structure. The structural system is of steel beam and joist floor and roof construction with some vertical supports of cast iron (interior only). The main doorway (south elevation) is surmounted by a beautiful stained glass window in a quadrant arch enclosing the seal of Syracuse in blended colors. Syracuse City Hall has overall physical dimensions of 78 feet by 204 feet.

B. Description of Interior

The interior of Syracuse City Hall has principally been used for municipal offices and City Common Council meetings. The general layout includes a basement for mechanical equipment, maintenance and storage, first floor offices, third floor offices and Council Chambers, fourth floor offices, and a fifth floor, or attic, which houses the new mechanical equipment. The original woodwork is oak.

Most door frames are surmounted by fan lights. Beautiful oak wainscoting and ceiling tiles adorn the third floor Common Council Chambers and the surrounding corridors and stairwells. The original stairs have ornamental cast iron newels and balusters with oak handrails. The second floor main hall has marble wainscoting and the floor is covered with mosaic tile. Original 13 feet high plaster ceilings have been kept at their original height in main corridors and near all windows. Mechanical Systems are hidden above lowered falseceilings in interior offices, but jut up to the original ceiling, four feet from each window. This treatment was applied during the 1977-78 renovation so that the window appearance would not change from the outside looking in.

The new heating system in Syracuse City Hall is a recirculating hot water system serving automatically controlled finned tube radiation at the perimeter of the building. Mechanical ventilating equipment and ducts ventilate toilet rooms, basement storage areas, the boiler room and mechanical rooms. The new central air conditioning system serves the first through fourth floors and is the variable air volume tupe to minimize energy consumption. As mentioned in Part I, Secion A-5, the 1977-78 renovation also included new plumbing, electric service, fire protection equipment, two new elevators, interior painting, and carpeting in non-public areas.

C. Site

Syracuse City Hall provides a strong visual focus for the area. It occupies the entire block on which it is situated and faces the south. The John H. Hughes State Office Building immediately to the east, and the New York Telephone Building to the southeast, are the largest nearby structures and provide the most direct contrast in scale and form to City Hall. The Greek Revival Weighlock Building, which is now the Canal Museum, is located to the north. Commercial structures are to the west and sourth. The north side of the building showcases a flower garden maintained by the City's horticulturist.

Part III. Sources of Information

A. Architectural Drawings:

All known architectural drawings and specifications pertaining to the building's original construction and subsequent alterations are housed in the City Engineer's Office on the fourth floor of City Hall. Drawings are dated from 1890 through the most recent changes made in 1978.

B. Early Views:

The most extensive collections of photographs, newspaper clippings and other articles on City Hall are the property of the Onondaga Historical Association located at 311 Montgomery Street in Syracuse. Included in the collection are photos of City Hall during construction in 1890 and 1891. The Canal Museum in the Weighlock Building owns various photographs and exhibits relating to the early development of Syracuse, including material related to City Hall. The Canal Museum is located directly behind Syracuse City Hall at Montgomery and Water Streets and Erie Boulevard East. The Landmarks Association of Central New York also maintains a file on Syracuse City Hall. The offices are located at 306 Hawley Avenue in Syracuse.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary Sources:

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Evening News; Syracuse, New York, March 11, 1892.

Syracuse Herald-Journal; Syracuse, New York, December 30, 1974.

Syracuse Standard; Syracuse, New York, February 3, 1888; December 3, 1890; December 4, 1890.

Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Syracuse, New York - 1889.

Various architectural drawings dated from 1890 to 1978, Syracuse City Hall, City Engineer's Office, Syracuse, New York.

2. Secondary Sources:

Application for nomination to The National Register of Historic Places, dated March 12, 1975, prepared by Mr. John Coffey, Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency.

Application for funding under the Local Public Works Program, Economic Development Administration dated October 25, 1976, prepared by staff in the Office of Federal and State Aid Coordination, City of Syracuse.

Beauchamp, William M., Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County, New York: S.J. Clarke Pub.Co., 1908.

The Downtowner, Syracuse, New York, April 10, 1977, Issue No. 34

Onondaga Landmarks, Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, Syracuse, 1975.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

It is believed that informational material on City Hall may be available through extensive research at Syracuse University's Bird Library.

E. Supplemental Material:

Additional material of interest is attached in the Appendix of this document.