

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Municipal Auditorium

Other names/site number: Civic Center Music Hall

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 201 North Walker Avenue

City or town: Oklahoma City State: OK County: Oklahoma

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

<p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Title :</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE:  
auditorium  
museum  
music facility  
sports facility  
theater

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE:  
music facility  
theater

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## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

Art Deco  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Municipal Auditorium, located in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, is a five-story, limestone and blond brick, Art Deco style building constructed between 1936-1937 as part of the Oklahoma City Civic Center. A local bond in combination with New Deal Public Works Administration (PWA) funding financed the construction of the Civic Center. The other buildings constituting the Civic Center included the Oklahoma County Courthouse (NRIS #92000126), the Oklahoma City Municipal Building (NRIS #07000521) and the Police Headquarters and City Jail. Each of the buildings were designed by different architects to meet the unique needs of the intended function, as well as harmonize with each other. Noted Oklahoma architect Josephus Overton (J.O.) Parr designed the Municipal Auditorium. The commodious building accommodated more than 6,000 persons in the main auditorium alone. The auditorium occupied nearly all of the block created by the abandonment of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific (Rock Island) railroad tracks and the Saint Louis-San Francisco (Frisco) depot and tracks through the middle of downtown Oklahoma City in 1930-1931 and the city of Oklahoma City's subsequent purchase of parts of the adjoining additions. As part of the City Beautiful plan developed initially by the city planning and landscape architecture firm of Hare and Hare, the building includes a large plaza area in front of the building. While the plaza area has been modernized, it retains its historic three-part division with the center portion providing an unimpeded view of the building. Because the core area of the plaza maintains its historic design, the plaza is considered a contributing site to the Municipal Auditorium. Containing multiple community spaces, including the five-story main auditorium, Hall of Mirrors, Little

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Theater and various meetings rooms, the Municipal Auditorium has wide, uncovered, concrete, partial porches on the north, east and south sides that each feature multiple sets of multi-door, above-grade entries. The front (east) porch maintains its historic array of five sets of quadruple, aluminum framed, glazed slab doors. The side porches also maintain five sets of doors but the two outside openings on each side have been reduced from triple doors to a single door with double full-height sidelights and square transoms. The metal casement windows throughout the building have been replaced with metal fixed windows which are divided to mimic the original fenestration pattern. On the rear of the building, a blond brick addition, added as part of the 2001 renovation, includes a multi-bay semi loading dock. The addition is readily distinguished by the lack of limestone detailing and a slightly lighter colored brick. Due to its rear location, compatible but differentiated building materials and lack of ornamental detail, the addition is understandable as an addition so it does not diminish the building's historic integrity. The replacement of the windows and modification to the side entries diminishes the building's integrity of materials but as the fenestration pattern overall remains evident, the building retains its ability to convey its historic significance. The interior of the building maintains many of its original spaces, including the vestibule, main lobby, Hall of Mirrors, and Zebra Theater. Many of the other community rooms are not in use and the main auditorium was completely renovated twice at roughly thirty year intervals. The first renovation to the main auditorium occurred in the mid-1960s and the second one in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Continuing to serve the Oklahoma City community for nearly eighty years, the Municipal Auditorium retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association sufficiently to stand out as an excellent example of a monumental Art Deco style building designed by prolific Oklahoma architect J.O. Parr and as a historically important, multipurpose, entertainment/recreation venue for Oklahoma City.

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### **Narrative Description**

The Municipal Auditorium has a concrete foundation. The majority of the different sections of the roof are flat with the main section over the auditorium being hipped. The flat sections are tar and gravel and the hipped roof is clad with rolled membrane roofing. The different sections of roof have brick parapets of various heights. The lower and inside portions of the parapets are common red brick. The upper and outside portions of the parapets are blond brick. The parapets are topped by cast stone and limestone copings, the visible ones are ornamented with the less visible copings lacking ornamental detailing.

The building faces east overlooking the plaza that is an original element of the Civic Center's City Beautiful plan and continues to separate the Municipal Auditorium from the Oklahoma City Municipal Building (see photograph 1). Historically, North Dewey Avenue separated the auditorium from the plaza and provided on street parking directly in front of the building. The portion of North Dewey Avenue between Couch Drive and Colcord Drive was renamed Channing Square in 1977 in honor of Carol Channing who was performing in *Hello Dolly* at the Municipal Auditorium. As part of the 2001 renovation, Channing Square was closed with

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decorative paving extended from the plaza through the former street, although limited vehicular traffic continues to cross the flat paved area.<sup>1</sup>

The east elevation of the Municipal Auditorium has a center, projected, three-story, block of limestone with the side bays and upper auditorium wall being blond brick (see photographs 2 through 4). The use of limestone allowed the auditorium to blend with the other limestone buildings in the 1930s Civic Center with the more extensive use of blond brick reducing the cost of the immense building. A drawing of the building by J.O. Parr in 1935 shows the building was originally conceived to be all limestone with the design staying virtually the same despite the change in materials.<sup>2</sup> Wrapping around the lower part of the east and north walls of the limestone section is a granite cornerstone. On the east side of the cornerstone are the inscribed words “Municipal/Auditorium.” On the north side of the cornerstone is simply “1936.”

The concrete porch on the east elevation extends the full-width of the limestone section (see photographs 2 and 4). Off the both sides of the porch, there are concrete accessibility ramps. The ramps extend from the porch to the adjacent sidewalk but are not readily visible due to the landscaping on the corners of the building. Nonoriginal metal railings symmetrically divide the front concrete stairs. At both ends of the stairs, there are raised, square, limestone blocks that each feature an elaborate, iconic, Art Deco, metal, light fixture, along with a lower metal railing.

To accommodate the large crowds using the building, the main entry consists of five sets of quadruple doors with rectangular transoms (see photograph 3). Flanking each set of doors are multi-story, fluted, limestone pilasters that have a wide base and a narrow, rectangular, fluted capital. Above the door transoms, there are slightly recessed, ornamental, limestone panels. Above the panels, there are five sets of over height, rectangular, multi-light windows. The metal windows have been replaced with the lower casement windows changed to fixed windows. The replacement windows do not exactly match the original divisions so they are distinguishable as replacements. Centered above the windows, there is a projected sign that reads “Civic Center Music Hall.” The projected sign was added in the mid-1960s when the building changed names. Originally, the space contained the inscribed historic name of “Municipal Auditorium.” Above both outside windows, there is a slightly projected, rectangular, limestone block. Near the top of the limestone wall, six ornamental cast stone blocks correspond to the fluted pilasters below. The blocks have a design similar to the decorative detail on the tall aluminum light fixtures anchoring the porch. Immediately above the ornamental blocks is a narrow, ornamental, wave-type band that extends the full length of the limestone section. Above this is a band of limestone blocks with a narrow coping that is stepped to create a subtle parapet along the limestone section.

On both walls on the sides of the east elevation limestone projection, there are five windows divided into two sections (see photographs 2 and 4). The two sets of windows maintain their historic separation consisting of rectangular, black, structural glass panels. Originally consisting

<sup>1</sup> *Daily (Oklahoma City) Oklahoman*, 29 June 1977 and 2 September 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Oklahoma Publishing Company, Photograph 2012.201.B0125.0193, 5 September 1935 (available The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, accessed 26 January 2016, <http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc310515/m1/1/?q=Municipal%20Auditorium>).

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of casement windows flanked by narrow sidelights, the current windows are all four-light fixed with the middle lights being larger than the narrow flanking sidelights. The lower three windows are the same size. Above these in the upper set of windows, the bottom window is slightly smaller than the lower windows with the uppermost window being about half the size of the lower windows.

Flanking the limestone section on the east elevation are matching, blond brick, canted corner sections (see photographs 1, 2, 4 and 5). The flat plane portions of the blond brick sections of the east elevation feature only one long vertical niche that has an ornamental fixed window on the top. Immediately below the window on both sides is a cast stone ornament. Above the niches on both sides are the wide limestone beltcourses that wrap around both side elevations. Along the upper wall, there is another decorative band that consists of a narrow, ornamental, cast stone band topped by a square band of limestone blocks with an ornamental cast stone coping.

The canted corner portions of the east elevation feature the same fenestration pattern as on the sides of the limestone section. The four-light windows in the canted corners are larger with the sidelights being the same width as the center lights. As on the limestone section, black structural glass panels separate the windows. Along the sides of the windows are vertical brick corbels. The upper wall of the canted corners are ornamented the same as on the flat plane section.

The brick south elevation is divided into five symmetrical bays (see photographs 5 through 7). The easternmost bay has three vertical sets of windows divided similar to the canted corners. The type of window in each vertical set of windows is the same as in the canted corners. On the first floor, the westernmost window has been replaced with a small overhead freight door. The upper wall in the easternmost bay is also ornamented the same as on the canted corner. The adjacent, narrow, projected bay contains four windows divided by black structural glass panels. Extending the full-height of the windows is multiple vertical corbels. The two fixed lights in the center of each window is flanked by triple sidelights. This bay has the wide limestone beltcourse and coping but lacks the decorative cast stone ornamental detail of the flanking bays.

The large center bay of the south elevation features an uncovered, full-width, concrete porch (see photograph 6). Four sets of metal railings divide the stairs. On both ends of the porch, there are raised, rectangular, limestone blocks that feature short, aluminum, Art Deco style, light fixtures and wraparound metal railings. The center bay contains five entry bays. The three center doors retain their historic configuration of triple, metal framed, glazed slab doors with metal transoms. The two outermost bays have been converted to a single, metal framed, glazed slab door with full-height sidelights to the west and triple transoms. Similar to the front elevation, multi-story, fluted, limestone pilasters flank the three center sets of doors. The outer two sets of doors are flanked on the outside by the adjacent projected brick bays. Ornamental cast stone panels top the doors. Above each set of doors are multi-story windows. The different sized windows are single-light, fixed and are separated by not original, black, opaque panels. The center three windows feature metal vents along the bottom. The limestone beltcourse extends along the top of the windows and the upper wall is ornamented the same as on the limestone section on the east

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elevation. This includes the same cast stone decorative panels on the brick wall, a cast stone decorative band and wide limestone coping.

The narrow bay on the west side of the center bay of the south elevation is ornamented the same as on the corresponding bay on the east side of the center bay (see photograph 7). The fenestration pattern, however, is slightly different. The two upper windows are the same but rather than two windows separated by black structural glass on the bottom, there is only a single, oversized, metal window. The two-light center has a three-part transom, sidelight and bottom lights. Two large metal vents are located in the above grade concrete foundation.

The westernmost bay of the south elevation features the same upper wall ornamental as on the easternmost bay, including the limestone beltcourse immediately above the windows (see photographs 7 and 8). The triple set of vertical windows are divided similar to the adjacent narrow bay with double windows separated by black structural glass panels and a single window on the first floor. The first floor windows have black opaque panels surrounding the center two-light window. Also visible are single metal vents on the basement level.

The brick west elevation has been largely obscured by the 2001 addition; however, as the rear wall, this elevation had minimal fenestration and ornamental detail anyway (see photographs 8 through 10). Still visible on the uneven west elevation are the limestone beltcourse and upper wall cast stone and limestone detailing. Barely visible on the south side, there is single upper window that peaks over the uneven addition. The blank windows below the limestone beltcourse in the tall center section and northernmost section of the original west elevation also remain visible. The various components of the addition are a slightly lighter brick than the original wall and feature a narrow concrete coping. The addition includes a fenced area for mechanical equipment on the west side and a multi-bay semi loading dock that faces north. Adjacent to the loading dock on the north side of the addition, there is a small office area that includes a double, metal framed, glazed slab door flanked by full-height sidelights. To the west of the entry is a single fixed window and the office area is accessed by a concrete accessibility ramp. In the far east corner of the north side of the addition, there is a single metal slab door.

The original north elevation of the Municipal Auditorium is also divided into five bays (see photographs 10 through 12). The westernmost bay contains a center, uncovered, partial porch with brick sidewalls. The entry at the top of the stairs consists of metal, double, paneled doors. Extending from the top of the entry to the limestone beltcourse is a vertical, brick, recessed, blind opening. On either side, there are matching, symmetrical, blind openings that extend down to about the mid-height level of the doors. The upper wall is ornamented the same as on the south elevation.

The adjacent, narrow, projecting bay matches the corresponding bay on the south elevation (see photograph 11). The wider center bay also matches the corresponding bay on the south elevation, including the uncovered, full-width, concrete porch with Art Deco light fixtures. The easternmost bay is also similar to the corresponding bay on the south elevation; however, the

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first floor window on the west side remains a window, rather than a freight door as on the south elevation (see photograph 12).

Off both the northeast and southeast corners of the Municipal Auditorium are large round concrete planters, added as part of the 2001 renovation (see photographs 1-2, 4 and 13 through 16). On either side of the round planters, there are white metal projections on which various lights and banners are mounted. As part of the commemoration of the Oklahoma Centennial in 2007, the Oklahoma Centennial Commission commissioned Mike Larsen to cast a bronze statue titled *The Conductor* that stands above grade on a granite base to the south of the north set of white metal projections. Rows of planters along the center of both sides of the former Channing Square also mark the decorative paving that continues onto the plaza area. On both the northwest and southwest corners of the plaza, there are large white corner ornaments. The plaza is divided into three sections. The center section features low granite planters on the east side with a larger black granite area on the west side. Between this is a grassy area. The center section is separate from the flanking sections by concrete sidewalks, which is consistent with the original design of the plaza. Diagonal planters rhythmically separate the side sections of the plaza. The plaza was renovated in the mid-1970s as a bicentennial project. The bronze casting celebrating the 1889 Land Run remains in place on the south side of the plaza, along with other plaques and elements of the bicentennial renovation. The plaza was also renovated as part of the 2001 work. All of the landscape elements are considered part of the contributing plaza site with only the site being counted separately from the building.

## **INTERIOR**

The east doors open onto a long narrow vestibule with Art Deco style light fixtures and wood interior doors that feature three octagonal windows and wood transoms divided similar to the upper exterior windows (see photograph 17 and 18). The vestibule opens onto a large lobby area that includes a center ticket booth, end stairways, stylized light fixtures and Deco-inspired ornamental detail (see photographs 19 through 23). The lobby gives way to the multi-level passageways to the main auditorium, which was rebuilt as part of the 2001 renovation to improve the acoustics and provide an enhanced theater experience for a smaller crowd than the original that was designed to accommodate huge crowds at a variety events, including sporting events (see photograph 21 and 28). Directly above the vestibule and lobby is the Hall of Mirrors, a banquet-sized theater and community room that features a small wood stage area, stylized light fixtures and quadruple wood paneled doors underneath an expanse of mirrors on the west side (see photograph 26). The main auditorium now features multi-tiers of seating, including along the sides which originally only featured one balcony level. The Municipal Auditorium contains a variety of small offices and community rooms on the second floor, many of which are no longer in use. On the first floor, there are two side lobbies, one each on the north and south sides (see photographs 24 and 25). The north side lobby provides access to the historic Little Theater. The Little Theater, now known as Freede Little Theatre, has suffered fire damage and has been renovated over the years, although the space retains its historic seats, some Art Deco style light fixtures and ornamental detail (see photograph 27). The basement of the Civic Center contains multiple dressing rooms, lounges, wardrobe and practice spaces.

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## **ALTERATIONS**

The building has been altered most significantly on the interior with the essentially rebuilding of the main auditorium to facilitate continued use of the building despite the proliferation of competing venues. Exterior changes include the replacement of the metal casement windows with fixed metal windows, conversion of the end entry doors on the north and south elevations from triple doors to single doors, the addition with loading docks to the rear and the changes to the plaza. While these changes diminish the building's integrity of materials, the Municipal Auditorium retains its overall integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The building remains distinctly recognizable as the historic Municipal Auditorium constructed in 1936-1937.

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### Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Entertainment/Recreation  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1936-1962  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1937  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Parr, J.O. architect  
W.S. Bellows Construction Company, builder

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Municipal Auditorium, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with entertainment/recreation in Oklahoma City. In addition to conventions, plays, programs and concerts, the building provided space for athletic events, displays, dances, circuses and as an art center. The building is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of the Public Works Administration (PWA) vernacular of the Art Deco style in Oklahoma City. While the three other buildings constructed at the same time as part of the Oklahoma City Civic Center are also good examples of the PWA vernacular of the Art Deco style, the Municipal Auditorium is distinguished by its use of both brick and limestone, as well as the mass of the building. The Municipal Auditorium is also eligible under Criterion C for its association with esteemed Oklahoma City architect J.O. Parr. As an example of Parr's solo work, the Municipal Auditorium is an exemplary example of Parr's contribution to Oklahoma's built environment. The period of significance for the Municipal Auditorium extends from 1936 through 1962. The period of significance begins with the initiation of the building's construction in 1936. Marking the completion of the building, the year 1937 is a significant date within the period of significance. The period of significance ends in 1962 when Oklahoma City residents approved a \$7.5 million bond for convention facilities. The 1962 bond financed the renovation of the Municipal Auditorium into a music hall and construction of an all-sports arena at the State fairgrounds and a downtown convention-exhibition center. The bond marks the end of the Municipal Auditorium's role in Oklahoma City as the largest indoor venue for a wide array of events from convention to dog show, athletic competition to religious service, art exhibit to community meeting, stage production to circus performance and more.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

In 1928, the city of Oklahoma City engaged S. Herbert Hare of the renowned Kansas City, Missouri, city planning and landscape architecture firm of Hare & Hare to complete the unfinished comprehensive city plan initiated in 1919 by noted City Beautiful planner George E. Kessler of St. Louis, Missouri. The original scope of the citywide plan was to provide a plan for future growth, as well as resolve existing problems ranging from street widening to litigation related to the inadvertent dumping of sewage in the North Canadian River.<sup>3</sup>

One of the major impediments to development in Oklahoma City during the first decades of the twentieth century were the multiple railroad facilities that extended through the central business district. In addition to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (Santa Fe) Railway Company, which had tracks in the area before the city of Oklahoma City sprang into existence in 1889, three other

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Savage, "City Beautiful Movement," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, [www.okhistory.org](http://www.okhistory.org) (accessed January 26, 2016).

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railway companies quickly laid track through the community. The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific (Rock Island) arrived in Oklahoma City in 1895. The Saint Louis-San Francisco (Frisco) entered the city in 1898 and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (Katy) added a fourth rail line into Oklahoma City in 1903. Although the railroads were instrumental in Oklahoma City's early phenomenal twentieth century growth, they also quickly become a point of intense contention as early city leaders had "failed to visualize just what location of tracks, passenger and freight depots through the main part of town would do" as the city grew. At-grade railroad crossings, which posed a substantial risk for injury and death, was one of the paramount concerns that led to a twenty-year fight to remove both the Rock Island and Frisco facilities from downtown Oklahoma City and elevate the Santa Fe tracks. Finally, after years of various scenarios, the Rock Island and Frisco agreed to vacate their right-of-ways in downtown Oklahoma City and construct a Union Depot (NRIS #78002254) about six blocks south of downtown Oklahoma City.<sup>4</sup>

One of the major recommendations made in Hare & Hare's 1930 city plan was development of a civic center. The report notes "In Oklahoma City there can be no question but that a Civic Center is a desirable and necessary phase of its civic development." The report further describes the existing public buildings as "not a credit." As described in the 1930 city plan developed by Hare & Hare, "The area acquired through the removal of the railroads forms the basis of an ideal site for (new public) buildings with the opportunity for a dignified setting." The report recommended acquiring additional adjacent land in order to "give a much better opportunity for properly developing the surroundings of the monumental building" to be constructed.<sup>5</sup>

As conceived by Hare & Hare, the city hall would be located between Hudson and Walker Avenues. Separated from the city hall by a block-wide plaza, the Municipal Auditorium was to be located between Dewey and Lee avenues with a park on the block to the west. There were no provisions for the city jail and police station in the 1930 plan and the Oklahoma County Courthouse remained in its turn of the twentieth century location one and one-half blocks to the south between Walker and Dewey avenues.<sup>6</sup>

Although the Great Depression was taking its toll on Oklahoma City's economy, construction of a municipal auditorium continued to be of community interest. In August 1931, city lawyer Albert McRill declared that the "proposal by Flint and Company of New York to build a municipal auditorium here and take payment in annual rentals for 21 years" was illegal because the city could not contract payments beyond the current fiscal year. Backers of the proposal claimed that the city could use the money from renting the auditorium to make the annual

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Allen and Cynthia Smelker, *Final Survey Report: Intensive-Level Survey of the Central Park, Jefferson Park and Paseo Neighborhoods in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*, (available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: March 1994), 13-14. See also Roy Stewart, *Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Metro Press Inc., 1974), 147-148, and Kent Ruth, National Register Nomination for *Union Depot*, NRIS #78002254, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 1977, (available, Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: [http://nr\\_shpo.okstate.edu/nhrpdfs/78002254.pdf](http://nr_shpo.okstate.edu/nhrpdfs/78002254.pdf)), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> Hare & Hare, *The City Plan for Oklahoma City*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: City Planning Commission 1931), 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

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payments. With the building scheme halted, the former railroad area was used for various public purposes. For example, in May 1931, the Boy Scouts “transformed the old railway site from isolation into a small thriving city within the few minutes as the “pitch tents” order was given.” Acclimating to their environment, the scouting event closed “with a “lost child” hunt in the business district.”<sup>7</sup>

In April 1933, the park development committee of the city planning commission was “at work on a long-time plan for development of a civic center in the downtown railway park land, along the lines suggested by S. Herbert Hare, former planning consultant.” The 1933 plans called for a city hall, public library and municipal auditorium, although “none of the commissioners expects to see these buildings erected in the immediate future.” Development that was expected to take place was “confined to ordinary beautification through the planting of grass, trees and flowers.” This work was to be done with the cooperation of the park department “to the fullest extent.” Less than four months later, a new playground, called befittingly Rock Island Park, opened on the Civic Center site with a daylong program sponsored by “City character-building agencies.”<sup>8</sup>

In January 1934, the Oklahoma County Bar Association asked for a ninety-day delay on a bond election to vote funds for construction of a city hall on park property and a county courthouse on the existing courthouse site. The delay was necessary to allow the Oklahoma supreme court to make a decision on the title to the Civic Center park property. At the same time, it was reported that talks between the county commissioners and city councilmen concerning a joint city-county building would also resume. The meetings were anticipated to include consideration of selling the existing county courthouse land and “several pieces of city-owned property” to finance the new buildings.<sup>9</sup>

The state supreme court heard three cases involving title to former railroad lands in March 1934. At issue was whether the railway company could convey title of the land to the city rather than adjacent property owners. The case concerning the Rock Island lands was brought against the city of Oklahoma City by George Noble, William Noble and Robert W. Higgins Jr. At the same time, a similar case involving the Frisco property was being appealed by the city. In a case involving oilman E.W. Marland in Kay County earlier in the day, the supreme court held that a railroad had the right to dispose of property received under a voluntary deed.<sup>10</sup>

Just days later, the city planning commission was readying to write “Another chapter in the controversy over the development of Civic Center park.” With adjacent landowners seeking to make “driveways in the strip,” the city planning commissioner adopted a resolution causing the city engineer “to make a detailed survey of the land to determine what property owners allegedly have encroached on the railway land strip.” The city engineer quickly revealed that a survey had been done in September 1931 with three buildings extending over the property line, two of them by just two inches. New construction in the area, consisting of the Ramsey Tower and Skirvin

<sup>7</sup> Daily Oklahoman, 14 August 1931 (1) and 14 May 1932 (7).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 11 April 1933 (12), 7 July 1933 (5) and 8 July 1934 (5).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 23 January 1934 (2).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14 March 1934 (9).

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Tower, were located on the abutting lines with no encroachment. The controversy over encroachment continued through the end of October 1934.<sup>11</sup>

As part of its twenty-five year plan, the city commission was also studying locations for a municipal auditorium. As a member of the commission, the mayor visited Kansas City to inspect their new municipal auditorium. At the time, sites other than the Civic Center property were being considered for the municipal auditorium due to fears that the lack of parking would make the Civic Center property unsatisfactory.<sup>12</sup>

In late November 1934, the planning commission endorsed the mayor's proposal "for immediate development of Civic center." Having just returned from a national conference of mayors in Chicago, the mayor informed the city planning commission that "Oklahoma City should take advantage of federal funds for public buildings that will be made available by the next congress." The mayor also reported to the commission on an inspection tour of the municipal auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri, and talks with Leonard Bailey and George Winkler, representatives of the Allied Association of Architects, concerning provision of sufficient parking at the Civic Center site. The commission requested that Bailey and Winkler "draft plans for Civic center development, giving special consideration to the location and construction of a municipal auditorium." The Allied Association of Architects representatives indicated it would take two weeks for the plans to be drawn. At the same time, the county bar association was renewing "its campaign for a new courthouse" with a joint city-county building still under consideration.<sup>13</sup>

Following a joint meeting in early December 1934, "City, county and civic leaders...moved to reawaken Oklahoma City's interest in development of civic center as a site for modern municipal and county buildings." At the meeting, the "principal discussion revolved around the immediate need of a municipal auditorium to meet the city's rapidly expanding conventions list." The number of conventions in Oklahoma City had risen from fifty-eight in 1920 to 401 in 1934. Total attendance had grown to number 133,700. As noted by Victor E. Harlow, described as "one of the city's pioneer convention workers," the city had "overcome its lack of interest in conventions and its lack of hotel facilities, but its stalemated because it has no convention hall."<sup>14</sup>

The Civic Center effort received a boost days later with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's announcement that his new relief program would provide jobs rather than direct relief. This boded well for the planning effort with low rate loans to cities espoused as protecting the federal government's capital and allowing "solvent cities" to build permanent improvements. With several city architects providing plat plans and drawings of buildings, Oklahoma City's Civic Center was gaining speed. In mid-December 1934, the various plans and drawings were put on public display.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 26 March 1934 (3), 3 April 1934 (9), 6 April 1934 (12), 6 May 1934 (33), 16 May 1934 (4), 27 May 1934 (32), 28 July 1934 (16), 29 July 1934 (24), 4 August 1934 (1), 7 October 1934 (29), 21 October 1934 (23) and 25 October 1934 (2).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 28 October 1934 (12).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 27 November 1934 (1).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 4 December 1934 (2).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 9 December 1934 (24) and 16 December 1934 (20).

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Cost estimates for the two city and one county buildings were presented by the central committee on Civic Center development in mid-January 1935. At a total cost of about \$4 million, both the city hall and courthouse were expected to cost \$1.2 million each. The Municipal Auditorium was expected to cost \$1.6 million. Still remaining a problem, however, was that the Oklahoma supreme court had not arrived at a decision concerning the city's title to the Civic Center land. Both the bar association and Chamber of Commerce denied reports of friction caused by the "precedence to be accorded a courthouse or municipal auditorium." The central committee had "recommended that all buildings be constructed at the same time." With federal aid a critical component, information on unemployed employables was also being calculated "to back up the city's request for funds in the new public works program."<sup>16</sup>

As planned in January 1935, the Municipal Auditorium was to have a seating capacity of 8,000. The six auxiliary rooms were to seat between 100 to 500. The building would also include small committee rooms with a large display room in the basement. The four-story building would have elevators and armory facilities. The building was to measure 250' by 325'.<sup>17</sup>

Development of the plans continued in May 1935. With the Chamber of Commerce providing backing for the Municipal Auditorium project, a chamber committee had set requirements for the auditorium, including seating capacity and ground space. The Civic Center committee had been given the "responsibility of adopting a form of harmonizing architecture for the auditorium, courthouse and city hall." The committee planned to turn back plans on the city hall and courthouse to the architects because the buildings did not "harmonize." However, no definitive designs for the exterior of the Municipal Auditorium had been developed. Federal involvement in the project also remained pending. Concerns arose in mid-May 1935 when it appeared federal funds would possibly only cover thirty percent of project costs.<sup>18</sup>

With federal funding still unknown, the Oklahoma City city manager urged designation of a coordinating architect for the Civic Center development in mid-June 1935. While the city council delayed its decision for over a day, the two likely contenders for the job were Solomon Layton of the architectural firm Layton and Forsyth or J.O. Parr. At the time, the city council "was divided on the auditorium plans submitted by Layton and Parr" with most of those expressing an opinion favoring Layton's plan. Parr's plans for the city hall were reportedly favored over Layton's with Layton's courthouse plans causing controversy due to its proposed eleven-story height which due to the space between floors would equal a normal fourteen-story building. Parr's courthouse plan included a city hall and courthouse of about the same height but with the courthouse covering a larger area. Other plans were submitted by the Allied Association of Architects and the firm of Sorey, Hill and Sorey and Associates. Concerning the coordinating architect, it was believed that Layton had the edge due to the reported "known advantage" he had with county commissioners;

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 11 January 1935 (12) and 6 January 1935 (13).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 6 January 1935 (13).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 10 May 1935 (7), 14 May 1935 (2) and 17 May 1935 (1).

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however, should the city object to the courthouse plans and drop the building from the Civic Center plan, Parr was expected to be named the coordinating architect.<sup>19</sup>

The city council awarded Parr with the Municipal Auditorium contract on June 13, 1935. The city hall contract went to the Allied Associates. It was anticipated that the “other architects engaged in Civic center work probably will be asked to make their exterior designs conform to Parr’s.” Parr’s plan for the civic center, which called for “Modified Classic Architecture” was rated the best and was published in the *Daily Oklahoman* on June 14, 1935. With the city jail located west of the Municipal Auditorium that included a small plaza area, Parr’s plan called for the courthouse and city hall to share the block east of the auditorium. The courthouse design remained at issue with the city council “opposed to tall buildings on Civic center.” The county commissioners, however, named Layton and Forsythe as architects for the county courthouse shortly after the city council named their architects.<sup>20</sup>

In early July 1935, the state public works administrator, Colonel Philip S. Donnell, hand carried nine Oklahoma projects to Washington, D.C., including “Oklahoma City’s huge Civic Center building plans.” Some last minute revisions to the project paperwork were necessary as the architects used the spaces for a loan-grant basis, rather than an outright grant. To assist in “chaperoning passage” of the Oklahoma applications in Washington D.C., Oklahoma City city manager Orval Mosier was set to fly to Washington a few days after Donnell. In the interim, General W.S. Key, state works progress administrator, put his “stamp of approval” on the Civic Center plans. Before his flight left Oklahoma City, Donnell “scoffed at rumors that (the) purpose of his trip to Washington was a race to obtain federal grants for the Oklahoma City Civic center building (as) first in the nation.”<sup>21</sup>

With federal aid approved in the amount of forty-five percent of project costs, the plans for the Civic Center continued in early August 1935. Floyd Broderson, chairman of the Civic Center committee, was selected to lead the city and county bond drive. An election was set for September 3, 1935. Early polling for the bond issue indicated that a clear majority of voters favored passage of the bond. In the meantime, the building architects were meeting with the city park superintendent, Donald Gordon, who had also been designated as architect coordinator. At the meeting, “a comprehensive study of the type of architecture to be used in the buildings” was to be discussed. In advance of the meeting, drawings prepared by Parr of the auditorium were printed in the *Daily Oklahoman*. With a caption of “No Convention Too Large,” the drawings showed an auditorium capable of seating 8,200 persons with 3,800 on the main floor and 4,400 in the balconies. The seats on the main floor were to be removable to allow athletic events to be held in the auditorium. The images of the lobby and small meeting room are reminiscent of the existing lobby and Hall of Mirrors in the Municipal Auditorium.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 12 June 1935 (3).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 14 June 1935 (13) and 16 June 1935 (20).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 6 July 1935 (2) and 8 July 1935 (1).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 5 August 1935 (3), 3 August 1935 (1), 4 August 1935 (38) and 7 August 1935 (4).

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Subject to city council and county commissioner approval, the architects and park superintendent selected locations for the three new buildings on the Civic Center site in early August 1935. As proposed, the auditorium was to be on the west side with the city hall and courthouse sharing a site between Hudson and Walker. With the auditorium facing east towards Dewey Avenue, the building was to be separated from the city hall by a “formal plaza.” With the architects citing insufficient room on the Civic Center site, no plans were made for the city jail. However, indicating that location of the buildings was not resolved, the Civic Center campaign committee in mid-August 1935 recommended “the employment of an expert to aid architects in determining location of the new building.”<sup>23</sup>

With no organized opposition to the bond election, county and city residents were urged to vote on September 3, 1935. In addition to approving bonds for construction of the city and county buildings, the election included “Dedication of the Civic Center park property for use as building sites.” At a rate of five to one, the nearly \$1.8 bond issue overwhelmingly passed with the architects and public officials spending “the rest of the week haggling over details of the new Civic center city hall, auditorium, and county courthouse.” The decision to dedicate the Civic Center park for building purposes passed with a vote of six to one.<sup>24</sup>

Three weeks after the bond election, as bidding on the city bonds was underway, a revision in the Civic Center plans was announced. Dewey Avenue, which was described as “little more than a path across the tract,” would remain open rather than being closed as initially planned. A second set of plans for the auditorium floor were also to be considered by the city council. While the seating capacity would not change, the new proposal called for the main floor of the auditorium to be sloping rather than flat. The original plans allowed half of the flat floor to be elevated so the space could be adapted for athletic events. The new plan included a larger stage, which Parr pointed out could be used for the athletic events. Additionally, the new plan called for two balconies instead of the originally proposed single balcony. Concerning the other city buildings in the Civic Center, the city council approved arrangement of the fourth floor pillars in the city hall so as another floor could be added in the future. It was also decided to construct the city jail west of Shartel Avenue with the heating plant for all the city-owned Civic Center buildings to be sited behind the city jail.<sup>25</sup>

City manager Orval Mosier quickly took a stance against the sloped auditorium floor. Declaring “flatly that the curving, opera type floor” would not be satisfactory, Mosier was clear in his commitment to a floor that offered “the greatest possible utility for all groups.” The *Daily Oklahoman* reported that “several councilmen and Chamber of Commerce interests (had) brought pressure to bear on J.O. Parr, auditorium architect, to draw plans for a curving floor unsuitable for sports events.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 6 August 1935 (1) and 13 August 1935 (6).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 2 September 1935 (1), 4 September 1935 (1) and 8 September 1935 (30).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 21 September 1935 (2).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 24 September 1935 (1).

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With bids to be advertised at the end of October 1935, the city council set a November 28, 1935, date for award of the contract on the auditorium. This was about a week behind the bids and award dates set for the city hall and jail buildings. This was done to allow bidders the chance to reclaim their unsuccessful bond in time to post the mandatory bond on the other project as PWA regulations required “heavy bonds.” The selection of the dates were also influenced by the PWA’s December 15, 1935, deadline. The city’s dates had to allow sufficient time in the event the bids had to be re-advertised. Under PWA guidelines, ten days were required to re-advertise bids. The architects working on the projects pledged to the city manager to have the estimates and plans in Mosier’s hands by the dates set, even agreeing to employing extra architects to meet the deadline.<sup>27</sup>

In the second week of October 1935, Parr presented detailed plans for the auditorium to the city manager. The plans showed that Oklahoma City would “have an auditorium embracing the best features incorporated in similar buildings throughout the nation.” The main auditorium floor was to be “tilted” to allow it to be “adaptable for stage presentations and area events, including various kinds of sports.” With a maximum seating capacity of 7,509, the auditorium would have three balconies with the lower balcony disappearing when the floor was tilted. The first floor of the building would have 45,000’ of exhibit and banquet space, as well as a kitchen, check rooms, conference rooms, storage space and a concession stand. The plans also called for a basement mezzanine which was described as “one of the most modern features of the building.” The mezzanine would contain “rooms for choruses, orchestras, bands and principals of casts.” Tentatively included in the building was a pneumatically raised orchestra pit, as well as pipe organ panels, although the building fund did not include money for a pipe organ. The proscenium was to be ten feet wider than the one in the existing Shrine auditorium. In addition to the main auditorium, the building plans included a “Little Theater.” Complete in every aspect with a seating capacity of 500, the Little Theater was to be located in the northwest corner of the building. Accessibility to the Little Theater was to be from the north lobby with the ability to close off the rest of the building when access to only the Little Theater was desired. A third lobby was designed for the south side with the main lobby and vestibule being located on the east side. On the second floor above the main lobby and vestibule was to be a banquet room capable of seating 1,500. About ten smaller meeting rooms were also planned, which could be combined or separated by the use of sliding panels.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after presentation of the detailing plans, issues with the footings for the Civic Center buildings threatened the auditorium plans with reductions and delays. Leo Sanders, local contractor, performed core drilling tests on the building site in early to mid-October 1935. Sanders recommended that caisson footings be used to allow the footings to be located on solid rock, requiring a depth of 43’ to 47’ below ground level. The costly footings, estimated to increase foundation costs for the auditorium by about \$43,000, would necessitate elimination of “some of the proposed features of the buildings.” Well-digger C.R. Frazier was then brought in for further tests with results that showed spread footings would be satisfactory. The city council approved the building specifications with minor changes at their November 1, 1935 meeting.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 2 October 1935 (5) and 5 October 1935 (2).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9 October 1935 (1).

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Although two council members initially voted against the auditorium specifications due to concerns over the specified spread footings, later action in the meeting resulted in approval of all specifications.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the first week of November 1935, two sets of auditorium specifications had been given to potential bidders. The W.S. Bellows Construction Company and the firm of Reinhart and Donovan, both of Oklahoma City, requested the specifications. Despite the mayor going “into seclusion at his farm east of the city...to recheck specifications for” the buildings, the city was forced to re-advertise the bids on the auditorium due to a lack of acceptable bids. It was necessary to “slash” \$180,200 from the cost of the auditorium to bring the project within the \$1.2 available funding. The project reduction reduced the size of the building by 24’ and lowered it 8’4”. More visibly, the council ordered that the provision calling for a combination brick and stone exterior be used. While the front of the auditorium would remain stone, the other elevations would be a combination of brick and stone. The cost overrun was attributed to “an error in calculation of the amount of steel in the building and advancing steel prices.”<sup>30</sup>

Just under the PWA December 15, 1935, deadline, the city council finished awarding the contracts for the Civic Center projects. The \$1,042,565 contract for the auditorium was awarded to the W.S. Bellows Company. The start of construction work was delayed until after the first week in January 1936 because the removal of a high-pressure water line was hampered by the lack of sufficient “relief labor” to do the work. In late January, the city manager appointed three clerks to represent the city on the construction projects. Joe Thompson was appointed for the Municipal Auditorium with his duties to be a combination of clerk and inspector. The clerks were to be “on the job” until the buildings were completed, keeping records, filing progress reports and making sure “no unauthorized material substitutes” went into the buildings. Just days after Thompson’s appointment, it was announced that the auditorium project would be delayed indefinitely due to “pending arrangement of contracts guaranteeing delivery of steel.” The city had, however, received the federal government’s check for \$300,000 for partial payment of its “contribution toward construction of the auditorium.”<sup>31</sup>

In an attempt to secure the 1937 Oklahoma Education Association conference for Oklahoma City, city officials promised that the Municipal Auditorium would be finished by February 1937. About three weeks later, workmen were erecting the steel girders for the auditorium’s superstructure. Shortly after this, a \$140,000 deficiency threatened the building with an incomplete stage and continued elimination of air conditioning equipment. Also raising concerns was increasing awareness that “city officials have little hope of making revenue from the auditorium pay for its operation and maintenance.” As learned by city staff in traveling to various other cities, “Nearly all auditoriums, if not all, throughout the country are operating at deficits” which had to be made up through city budget appropriations. The city manager was careful to note “No campaigners in the bond election misrepresented the auditorium to city

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 17 October 1935 (16), 22 October 1935 (1) and 2 November 1935 (2).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 7 November 1935 (3) and 30 November 1935 (2).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 7 January 1936 (5), 16 January 1936 (6), 25 January 1936 (1) and 28 January 1936 (2).

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voters.” Mosier further explained “The need for it as a convention magnet was stressed, but no one ever said it would pay itself out or even pay its own operating expense.”<sup>32</sup>

With the PWA shifting to 40-hour weeks instead of 130-hour months, work on the Municipal Auditorium’s steelwork was thought to gain new momentum in July 1936; however, due to the hot Oklahoma sun, the change did not help. Steel workers were forced to handle the steel girders with extreme caution and shorten their days during the hottest part. In mid-August 1936, work on the auditorium lagged sixty days behind schedule with “little, if any, of the lost time” having been made up. At the end of August 1936, city officials “abandoned hope of completing the municipal auditorium on schedule.” With an estimated completion date of March 15 or April 1, it was fortunate the Oklahoma Education Association voted to hold their 1937 convention in Tulsa. To prevent loss of the federal grants on the project, the city council voted on September 29, 1936 to extend the auditorium deadline for seventy-two days.<sup>33</sup>

With the building delayed at least until the end of March 1937, the city council began studying specifications for \$40,000 worth of furniture and equipment in mid-November 1936. With not enough funding to completely equip the building, sufficient stage material “to meet the needs of most entertainment enterprises” was to be purchased. At the end of November 1936, a photograph in the *Daily Oklahoman* of the auditorium was captioned “Workmen Speed New Civic Auditorium.” It was anticipated that the exterior of the building would be complete by early December.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the ongoing work, “a huge exhibit of fire fighting equipment” was put on display in the basement of the auditorium in late December 1936. At the same time, the \$41,000 low bid for the auditorium seats was delayed when city officials became concerned on how the seats were to be installed to ensure installation in curved sections. In late January 1937, Oklahoma City’s Municipal Auditorium was declared “the second largest in the United States built by co-operative effort of local communities and the public works administration.” The largest project was in Kansas City and covered an entire city block with a building equal to the height of a ten-story building. Of the total \$1.2 cost for Oklahoma City’s Municipal Auditorium, the federal government provided \$540,000.<sup>35</sup>

With most of the “heavy construction” done, a tour led by Ralph Hemphill, temporary manager; M.B. Cunningham, assistant city manager; Bill Parr “affable son of the architect;” and, Joe Thompson, city inspector, occurred in mid-February 1937. With every seat declared “dandy,” a stage that “makes you gasp” and a foyer “so large that hundreds could mill around in it without congestion,” the building met all expectations except for capacity of the main auditorium. While the tour guides estimated 7,000, the wish was for “nearer 10,000.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 1 May 1936 (17), 22 May 1936 (16), 5 June 1936 (2).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 28 July 1936 (2), 17 August 1936 (3), 19 August 1936 (4), 27 August 1936 (3) and 30 September 1936 (1).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 15 November 1936 (51) and 29 November 1936 (38).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 27 December 1936 (20), 1 January 1937 (5) and 1 February 1937 (11).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 18 February 1937 (11).

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Although not fully finished, the Municipal Auditorium was included in the mid-April 1937 celebration of completion of Oklahoma City's Civic Center. Heralded as a "Dream Come True in Marble," the four buildings built on the former railroad lands were put on full display. Answering "One of the city's most baffling mysteries," it was finally announced that the main auditorium in the new Municipal Auditorium had a total seating capacity of 6,000. An extra 1,000 seats could be gained if the stage was used. This again fell short of expectations, which ranged from 6,600 to 8,000. Containing 311 orchestra and 105 balcony seats, the Little Theater had a capacity of 416.<sup>37</sup>

With "modern lighting paraphernalia" capable of producing waterfalls, fires and spotlights in any color and shape, the fully completed Municipal Auditorium was opened to the public on September 15, 1937. The main event at the opening was an all-star professional wrestling program with Sam Avey as promotor. Sitting on the flat main floor, the boxing ring featured a "remarkable ringlight" which was reportedly an exact duplicate of the one in the famed Madison Square Garden of New York City. The leather theater seats in Oklahoma City's Municipal Auditorium were 4" wider than the average seat and the "huge stage" had a 70' proscenium arch. Containing sixteen ticket windows, the lobby covered 4,850'. Restrooms were available on every floor and, underneath the stage, was "an elaborate system of dressing-rooms." Located in downtown Oklahoma City, the building was "surrounded by parking space adequate for capacity crowds."<sup>38</sup>

With the "mat show" continuing through the end of September 1937, other types of events quickly filled the auditorium. During the first week of October 1937, 350 "yapping terriers, woofing shepherds and baying hounds" took over the auditorium for a dog show. The state amateur autumn flower show was scheduled for October 16-17, 1937. Due to the volume of events, city officials established a "central clearing station for information on the various events" using the city hall telephone switchboard and information desk less than a month after the building opened to the public. This action "brought a dizzying deluge of queries" that swamped the city hall telephone operators with the number for ticket reservations and another auditorium information number being quickly publically announced. In February 1938, the Oklahoma Education Association met in the Municipal Auditorium, filling the main auditorium to full capacity for the first time. During the Oklahoma Education Association convention, the Municipal Auditorium was formally dedicated.<sup>39</sup>

In January 1938, discussions began concerning development of a permanent museum in the Municipal Auditorium as part of Oklahoma City's Federal Art Center. Organized by Nan Sheets under the Works Progress Administration in 1935, the art center remained located in the Municipal Auditorium from 1938 until 1958 when it relocated to the new Oklahoma Art Center at the state fairgrounds. More than 350 visitors visited the "new exhibit for the month of March

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 18 April 1937 (multiple pages) and 5 September 1937 (33).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 5 September 1937 (25 and 33) and 15 September 1937 (14).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 15 September 1937 (14), 29 September 1937 (12), 3 October 1937 (53), 6 October 1937 (11), 10 October 1937 (22), 12 October 1937 (7), 16 October 1937 (17), 17 October 1937 (29), 24 October 1937 (44), 12 February 1938 (5) and 8 February 1938 (2).

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at the Municipal Auditorium Federal Art Center” in early March 1938. The exhibit featured oil paintings by Oscar Jacobson, director of the University of Oklahoma school of art, sixty color block-prints by sixteen American makers and watercolors by Lewandowski, an artist from Wisconsin.<sup>40</sup>

Work on the Municipal Auditorium’s landscape began in early November 1937 with the planting of trees and shrubs across the Civic Center property. The work continued in late February 1938 with places for eight permanent pieces of statuary being provided. Although there were no city appropriations for the statuary, the park superintendent hoped that private donors would provide the funds for the “cultural advancement.” Two places were provided near the city hall with four locations on the Civic Center plaza between Walker and Lee avenues. The park superintendent hoped that the statues on the Civic Center plaza would be of national figures. The remaining two places were located adjacent to the Municipal Auditorium. In early April 1938, parking in the vicinity of the Municipal Auditorium was limited to three hours at all times. The assistant auditorium manager requested the change as “persons not attending auditorium meetings were jamming the area with parked cars.”<sup>41</sup>

As declared by Roy Stewart in his Oklahoma City history book *Born Grown*, the “Municipal Auditorium became Oklahoma City’s major building for plays, concerts and special events” for decades. In November 1946, the musical *Oklahoma!* set a record when 54,000 tickets were sold with over \$30,000 in mail orders having to be returned. Construction of the Municipal Auditorium helped Oklahoma City achieve its goal of being a nationwide convention center. During the 1940s and 1950s, Oklahoma City was third in the nation in the number of conventions. The Municipal Auditorium was specifically credited with drawing “thousands of visitors to Oklahoma City each year for conventions, sports, trade shows, plays and musical entertainment.” However, in 1962, Oklahoma City residents passed a \$7.5 million bond to provide “separate facilities for musical performances, conventions and sporting events.” The bond provided for the renovation of the Municipal Auditorium into a music hall, causing extensive changes to the interior of the main auditorium but leaving the exterior overwhelmingly intact. The bond also provided for the construction of a new all-sports arena at the state fairgrounds, as well as construction of a downtown convention-exhibition center. The passage of the bond heralded the end of the Municipal Auditorium’s reign as Oklahoma City’s indoor, multi-purpose, entertainment and recreation venue.<sup>42</sup>

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 23 January 1938 (12), 24 January 1938 (14) and 7 March 1938 (4). See also Stewart, *Born Grown*, 107-108.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 2 November 1938 (4), 27 February 1938 (30) and 8 April 1938 (4).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 4 July 1962 (1), 2 December 1962 (62) and 3 June 1963 (20). See also Stewart, *Born Grown*, 93-94; Dr. Bob Blackburn, “A Tradition of Elegance: 70 Years of the Skirvin Hotel,” original 1982, available City of Oklahoma City, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.okc.gov/projects/Skirvin.html> and Lucyl Shirk, *Oklahoma City: Capital of Soonerland*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma City Board of Education, 1957), 77.

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Like its Civic Center counterparts, the Municipal Auditorium is an exemplary example of the PWA vernacular of the Art Deco style. Characteristics of the style possessed by the building include stylized stone and cast concrete ornamental detailing, stylized metal light fixtures, vertical expanses of windows, geometric massing and the smooth, light colored wall surface. Despite the shared architectural style, the Civic Center buildings are clearly differentiated with each being a unique representation of the style.

Of course, other buildings in downtown Oklahoma City are also classified as being in the Art Deco style. Due to size of the Municipal Auditorium, most other Art Deco buildings in downtown Oklahoma City are relatively minor in comparison. The Santa Fe Depot (NRIS #15000874), which is located about seven blocks west and two blocks north of the Municipal Auditorium, is one of the largest, originally private examples of the Art Deco style in downtown Oklahoma City. The Santa Fe Depot, however, is readily differentiated from the Municipal Auditorium, particularly due to its horizontal massing. The corporate branding integrated in the decorative elements of the Santa Fe Depot also sets it apart from the public Art Deco buildings.

In addition to its architectural significance as an important example of the Art Deco style in Oklahoma City, the Municipal Auditorium is also significant as an example of the individual work of J. O. Parr. Born in Texas in 1877, Parr partnered with Edgar Smith in the architectural firm of Smith and Parr in McAlester, Oklahoma, prior to 1910. Around 1910, the pair moved the firm to Oklahoma City. Before and after this, the firm of Smith and Parr designed a number of high profile school buildings throughout the state, including the Administration Building at the Oklahoma College for Women in Chickasha, Oklahoma (NRIS # 01000950). Within Oklahoma City, the firm designed the Administration Building for the Oklahoma City College for Young ladies and the campus for the St. Joseph's Industrial School, among other projects. The firm also worked outside of Oklahoma, being responsible for the 1912 design of the Carnegie Library in Winfield, Kansas, the commission coming after inspection of the firm's First Presbyterian Church in Oklahoma City by the library's building committee.<sup>43</sup>

Around 1914, Parr entered into partnership with James Watson Hawk. Previous to joining forces with Parr, Hawk was a partner in the preeminent Oklahoma firm of Layton, Wemyss-Smith and Hawk. In addition to being named the architect for the Oklahoma state capitol building in 1910, the firm of Layton, Wemyss-Smith and Hawk designed numerous buildings of architectural note in Oklahoma City. By 1907, it was estimated that Hawk was the "designer of 80 percent of the largest and best constructed buildings in the city devoted to business, as well as many of the best designed and most expensive homes in the city." Hawk and Parr remained in partnership until 1932 when Hawk retired from architectural practice. Parr then carried on his own firm until his death in January 1940.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Savage, National Register nomination for *Tonkawa Lodge No. 157 A.F. & A.M.*, NRIS #07000910, Tonkawa, Oklahoma, 2007, (available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, [http://nr\\_shpo.okstate.edu/nhrpdfs/07000910.pdf](http://nr_shpo.okstate.edu/nhrpdfs/07000910.pdf)), 20-22.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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The alliance of Hawk and Parr provided Oklahoma with another preeminent architectural firm. In 1915, the firm was responsible for the design of the \$100,000 courthouse in Perry, as well as the plans and specifications for the new Science Hall at the University of Oklahoma, located in Norman. The firm continued to be widely prolific statewide until its 1932 demise. One of the most well-known buildings designed by Hawk and Parr in the early 1920s is the \$3 million Scottish Rite Temple (NRIS #87000503) in Guthrie. During the latter 1920s and early 1930s, the firm designed numerous buildings in Oklahoma City, including the \$4.5 million Biltmore Hotel. The last commission the firm received was for eighteen buildings at the federal penitentiary in El Reno.<sup>45</sup>

As indicated above, Parr was involved in the planning and development of the Municipal Auditorium from the start. More than the other public buildings in Oklahoma City's Civic Center, the Municipal Auditorium was a cultural attraction intended to benefit the city in a multitude of ways, including economically, educationally, artistically, socially, musically and athletically. As such, it was critical that the design of the building be both appealing and functional. The city's selection of Parr as architect for the Municipal Auditorium reflects his skill and success in his chosen profession, as well as his business acumen in negotiating the highly political situation inherent in 1930s public construction efforts. As noted in his obituary, "Parr designed some of the finest buildings in Oklahoma City during his long architectural career." The three buildings specified in his obituary were "the huge Scottish Rite cathedral (sic) at Guthrie, the Oklahoma City Biltmore hotel and the Oklahoma City municipal auditorium." While the first two were accomplished in partnership with other acclaimed architects, the Municipal Auditorium stands out as attributable specifically to J.O. Parr, AIA.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Miami (Oklahoma) Daily News-Record*, 26 January 1940 (6). See also *Daily Oklahoman*, 18 April 1937 (7).

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Savage, Cynthia. "City Beautiful Movement." *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. Accessed 26 January 2016, [www.okhistory.org](http://www.okhistory.org).

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Shirk, Lucyl. *Oklahoma City: Capital of Soonerland*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma City Board of Education, 1957.

Stewart, Roy. *Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Metro Press Inc., 1974.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # OK-09

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** N/A

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 6 Acres MOL

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.469035 | Longitude: -97.523496 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

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NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

A two block area bounded by Couch Drive on the north, North Walker Avenue on the east, Colcord Drive on the south and North Lee Avenue on the west, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. The area includes portions of Blocks 7 through 9 of the Bennet and Gerson Addition and Blocks 4 and 12 of the Main Street Addition that at the time of platting were separated by the Rock Island and Frisco tracks and right-of-way.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Municipal Auditorium, including the one-block plaza in front of the building. The plaza is part of the building as evidenced by the current address of the Municipal Auditorium at 201 North Walker Avenue.

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**Form Prepared By**

name/title: Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for the  
organization: City of Oklahoma City  
street & number: 346 County Road 1230  
city or town: Pocasset state: OK zip code: 73079  
e-mail: archconsulting.savage@yahoo.com  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: March 2016

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: **Municipal Auditorium**  
City or Vicinity: **Oklahoma City** County: **Oklahoma** State: **OK**  
Photographer: **Cynthia Savage**  
Date Photographed: **26 January 2016**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photo 0001:** East elevation (background) and Plaza (foreground), camera facing west.
- Photo 0002:** East elevation, camera facing southwest.
- Photo 0003:** East elevation, camera facing northwest.
- Photo 0004:** East elevation (left) and south elevation (right), camera facing northwest.
- Photo 0005:** South elevation, camera facing northwest.
- Photo 0006:** South elevation, camera facing northwest.
- Photo 0007:** South elevation, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0008:** West elevation, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0009:** West elevation, camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0010:** North elevation (left) and west elevation (right), camera facing southeast
- Photo 0011:** North elevation, camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0012:** East elevation (left) and north elevation (right), camera facing southwest.
- Photo 0013:** East elevation (left) and north elevation (right), camera facing southwest.
- Photo 0014:** Plaza, camera facing east.
- Photo 0015:** Plaza, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0016:** Plaza (background) and roof (foreground), camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0017:** Interior vestibule, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0018:** Interior vestibule, camera facing northwest.

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- Photo 0019:** Interior Main Lobby, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0020:** Interior Main Lobby, camera facing northwest.
- Photo 0021:** Interior Main Lobby towards hallway, camera facing southwest
- Photo 0022:** Interior stairs bottom flight looking up, camera facing northeast.
- Photo 0023:** Interior stairs bottom flight looking down into lobby, camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0024:** Interior North Lobby, camera facing southwest.
- Photo 0025:** Interior South Lobby, camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0026:** Interior Hall of Mirrors, camera facing south.
- Photo 0027:** Interior Little Theater, camera facing southeast.
- Photo 0028:** Interior Main Auditorium, camera facing northeast.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Map Source: OK/SHPO  
Data Source: US Census Bureau  
Date of Production: May 16, 2016