



NAME	Old Orange County Courthouse			REF. NO. 1
ADDRESS	211 West Santa Ana Boulevard			
CITY	Santa Ana	ZIP	92701	ORANGE COUNTY
YEAR BUILT	1901	LOCAL REGISTER CATEGORY: Landmark		
HISTORIC DISTRICT	Santa Ana Downtown	NEIGHBORHOOD	N/A	
NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	A, B, C	NATIONAL REGISTER STATUS CODE	1B	

Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

USGS 7.5" Quad _____ Date: _____ T _____ R _____ ¼ of _____ ¼ of Sec _____ : _____ B.M.

Prehistoric Historic Both

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Late Victorian Romanesque/Richardsonian Romanesque

DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND RELATED TO PERIOD ARCHITECTURE:

As its name implies, the Richardsonian Romanesque is derived from the architecture of Henry Hobson Richardson, one of the foremost American architects. Richardson's unique interpretation of the Romanesque style was widely imitated after his death in 1886. Characterized by masonry construction (whole or in part) and the use of round arches, Richardsonian Romanesque buildings have a massive quality that was well suited to public buildings intended to impress or awe the spectator. Used less frequently on commercial and residential improvements, the Richardsonian Romanesque vocabulary includes, in addition to the aforementioned use of masonry and round arches, an emphasis on lintels and arches executed in contrasting stone; bands of windows, either flat or round-headed, incorporating stone mullions and colonnettes; steep gabled wall dormers, and rounded bays topped by conical caps (Whiffen, 133-140).

CONSTRUCTION HISTORY: (Construction data, alterations, and date of alterations)

Constructed 1900-1901.
Tower removed 1933.
Vacated by courts in 1969.
Restored 1983-1992.

RELATED FEATURES: (Other important features such as barns, sheds, fences, prominent or unusual trees, or landscape)

Park-like grounds
Footprint of the county jail in north parking lot

DESCRIPTION: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, settings, and boundaries.)

Occupying a full city block, the Richardsonian Romanesque Revival Old Orange County Courthouse is a two and a half-story red sandstone building resting on a rusticated granite basement. Symmetrical in design, the building faces south onto landscaped grounds. A hipped and gabled roof of metal, made to resemble tile, caps the structure. The façade consists of five bays, the center and end bays raised and topped by steeply pitched front gables accented by wall dormers. A slightly overhanging cornice punctuated by corbel blocks circles the building. Elevated at the top of a short flight of stairs, the entry is located in the center bay, recessed behind a three bay arcade. Above a corbeled belt course, the second story contains a band of five arched openings containing recessed windows. The end bays contain rows of three flat-headed windows on the lower story and three arched windows on the upper story. Tripartite windows occupy the penultimate bays. The side elevations contain three bays, with secondary entries within single arches located in the center bays. Notable architectural detailing executed in stone includes impost moldings, lintels and sills, mullions, stringcourses defining transoms on the upper story, columns, and carved embellishments. The Old Orange County Courthouse was restored in 2000, and with the exception of the removal of the cupola and modification of the gable ends which occurred following the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake, the building looks substantially as it did when it first opened to the public in 1901.

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS:

Orange County became a county separate from Los Angeles on June 4, 1889, culminating years of struggle on the part of residents to be recognized by their more powerful neighbors to the north. Anaheim and Santa Ana vied to be county seat, the honor falling to Santa Ana on July 11, 1889. Initially court was convened in rented quarters in downtown Santa Ana. In 1893, the County purchased a parcel from William H. Spurgeon for \$8,000, promising to construct a courthouse within ten years. Following an interim improvement that housed the county jail, the courthouse was erected, opening with a daylong celebration in November 1901. C. L. Strange of Los Angeles was the architect. The facility housed county offices and a single courtroom. A second courtroom was added in 1914. Besides figuring prominently in the life of county residents, the courthouse has witnessed numerous far-reaching court decisions, including the “Whipstock” case, which dealt with slant oil drilling; interpretations of farm labor law; and the Overell trial resulting in law regulating explosives. The courthouse has also gained widespread recognition as the setting for political events—both Presidents Nixon and Clinton spoke from its steps—and as the backdrop for numerous film and television productions.

RESOURCE ATTRIBUTES: (List attributes and codes from Appendix 4 of Instructions for Recording Historical Resources, Office of Historic Preservation.)

HP14. Government Building

RESOURCES PRESENT:

Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other

MOVED? No Yes Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: (Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, geographic scope, and integrity.)

Santa Ana was founded by William Spurgeon in 1869 as a speculative townsite on part of the Spanish land grant known as Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana. Early growth and development was stimulated by the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1878 and the Santa Fe Railroad in 1886. By the end of the 1880s, Santa Ana’s downtown business district was defined by five city blocks of brick commercial buildings on Fourth Street, with the heart of the city at the intersection of Fourth and Main Streets (Thomas, 8:1). Following its incorporation as a city in 1886, and the establishment of Orange County in 1889, Santa Ana was selected as the new county seat.

The Old Orange County Courthouse is significant as the most recognized symbol of the history of Orange County and as a manifestation of the prominent role of Santa Ana in that history; for the noteworthy people and events associated with the operations of the courthouse; and for its outstanding embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style rarely seen in the western United States, the Richardsonian Romanesque. Its recent restoration, both exterior and interior, have resulted in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of its character-defining features and spaces, all of which should be preserved.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION:

This building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977 as an individual resource and in 1984 as a contributor to the Downtown Historic District. Under the regulations implementing the California Register of Historical Resources, the building is also listed in the California Register. Of exceptional historical and architectural significance, the Old Orange County Courthouse was the first resource listed in the Santa Ana Register of Historical Property. It has been categorized as “Landmark” because the building “is on the national register,” “is on the state register,” “has historical/cultural significance to the City of Santa Ana,” and has “unique architectural significance” (Municipal Code Section 30-2.2(1)). The property is also designated California Historical Landmark #837.

OWNER AND ADDRESS: County of Orange and PFRD
P.O. Box 4048
Santa Ana, CA 92702

RECORDED BY: (Name, affiliation, and address)
Leslie Heumann
Science Applications International Corporation
35 S. Raymond Avenue, Suite 204, Pasadena, CA 91105

DATE RECORDED: February 28, 2001

SURVEY TYPE: (Intensive, reconnaissance, or other)
Intensive Survey Update

REPORT CITATION: (Cite survey report and other sources)
City of Santa Ana, *Santa Ana's Historic Treasures*.
Les, Kathleen. "Santa Ana Historic Survey, Final Resources Inventory: Downtown." May 1980.
Thomas, Harold M. "Downtown Santa Ana Historic District" National Register nomination form,
1984.

REFERENCES: (List documents, date of publication, and page numbers. May also include oral interviews.)
Gebhard, David & Winter, Robert. *Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California*, 1977, p434.
Harris, Cyril M. *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. New York, WW Norton, 1998.
Marsh, Diann. *Eye on Santa Ana*. Fall 1992 (Internet: www.santaanahistory.com/articles/courthouse)
McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
National Register Bulletin 16A. "How to Complete the National Register Registration Form."
Washington DC: National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 1991.
Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.
"Santa Ana History." (Internet: www.santaanahistory.com/history)
"Old Orange County Courthouse." (Internet: www.goodtime.net/san/lcsan044)
"Old Orange County Courthouse." (www.ocparks.com/oldcourthouse)

EVALUATOR: Leslie J. Heumann **DATE OF EVALUATION:** February 28, 2001

EXPLANATION OF CODES:

- National Register Criteria for Evaluation: (From Appendix 7 of Instructions for Recording Historical Resources, Office of Historic Preservation)
 - A:** that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
 - B:** that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
 - C:** that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

- National Register Status Code: (From Appendix 2 of Instructions for Recording Historical Resources, Office of Historic Preservation)
 - 1B:** Listed in the National Register separately and as a contributor to a listed district.