

# Discover Oakland's Historic CITY HALL



*"This type of building being out of the original and conventional style, will attract notice everywhere, and will put Oakland in the front ranks of modern cities in the magnificence and attractiveness of its chief public building."*

—Oakland Mayor Frank K. Mott, OAKLAND TRIBUNE, July 23, 1910

Opened in 1914, Oakland City Hall is our city's fifth city hall. Soaring to 335 feet, 11 inches, it was the country's first high-rise government office building and the tallest structure west of Chicago. The groundbreaking ceremony took place on October 13, 1911, with state and local officials joining President William Howard Taft for the laying of the cornerstone.

Constructed at a cost of \$1.8 million, the steel frame building is clad with white California granite embellished with ornamental terra cotta friezes. The 11-floor office tower crowned with an ornate terra cotta lantern and clock tower sits atop a three-story ceremonial base.

Structurally damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, the building underwent an \$81 million renovation and seismic retrofit before reopening in September 1995. For its architectural and historical significance, Oakland's City Hall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## SELF-GUIDED TOUR

- Guests are invited to explore the publicly accessible areas of City Hall on Floors 1 through 3. Please respect those areas where access is restricted.
- On display near the front entrance is a wood-and-plaster, hand-painted model of City Hall believed to date from 1927 when a county fair exhibit featured models of downtown Oakland buildings. This artifact was discovered in a storeroom in 2006.
- Soaring 80 feet above the ground floor, the rotunda dome is one of the noteworthy features of city hall's elegant interior. The walls are plaster, scored to resemble limestone blocks.
- The grand central staircase made of marble and terra cotta, begins as a single 16-foot-wide feature before splitting into twin serpentine stairs leading to the third floor. At the staircase's first landing, you will find the dedication plaque from 1914.
- Suspended above is the original light fixture from 1914. Measuring five feet in diameter, the globe is studded with incandescent bulbs and is intended to represent the Sun. Above the globe, a bronze collar features Venus, Mars and other planets of our solar system.
- Continuing to the third floor, you will see the City Council Chambers' paneled oak doors which open to reveal a 40-foot-high, barrel vaulted ceiling. The fluted columns, terra cotta detail and ornate ceiling have been retained while a modern projection and sound system has been added.
- The History Display, located on the ground floor, contains models and photographs.
- On the building's exterior, view the terra cotta friezes of entwining tendrils of fig, grape and olive leaves that symbolize Oakland's and California's agricultural abundance.
- The slit windows on the top floor provided natural light for the City Jail that was used from 1914 to the early 1960s.
- The lovely green space and amphitheatre in front of City Hall are known as Frank H. Ogawa Plaza and honor a Japanese American Councilmember who served from 1966 to 1994.
- The large Oak tree that shades Ogawa Plaza was planted in 1917 by Charmian London, to honor her husband, literary great and longtime Oakland resident Jack London.



**Guided Tours of City Hall and Frank H. Ogawa Plaza may be arranged through the City-sponsored Oakland Tours Program. Contact the Tours program at (510) 238-3234. For more information, visit [www.oaklandnet.com/walkingtours](http://www.oaklandnet.com/walkingtours).**

  
**CITY OF  
OAKLAND**

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