

History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives



by Hynda Rudd,
City Archivist (Retired),
and Club Member

City Halls, on a Poster

■ Here's the story of one of the Club Store's newest items.

Approximately 12 years ago when I was the City's Records Management Officer and in charge of the City Archives, a gentleman, Herb McNeely Sr., came to visit me at my office at the Piper Technical Center. He brought with him an 8-by-10-inch drawing of our current City Hall. It had the appearance of being an engineering project. Herb referred to it as a sketch. I was so impressed by his talent that I asked him to enlarge and enhance it to hang in our reference area of our office. He returned in time with a framed drawing approximately 19 by 24. It was beautiful and hung near our front door. We received many comments about his elegant portrayal.

During that time, the Los Angeles City Historical Society (LACHS) held its monthly Board meetings in our huge reference room in the City Clerk's Records Management Division. At some point, because of the nature of the society, and the interest in Herb's drawing, I invited him to attend one of our board meetings. The group was so impressed by the artist and his masterful drawing, that Herb eventually became a board member, and his drawing became a topic of interest as an historical project for LACHS.

After much discussion with the members of the board and how to best market it as another portrait of City Hall, one of our board members – Irene Tresun, I believe -- came up with an incredible idea. During the same time period, LACHS was also much involved in developing and designing a historical tome on the history of Los Angeles City government from 1850 into the 21st century. This book eventually was published in 2007, and became a two-volume study of more than 1,000 pages. The official title is, *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History, 1850-2000*. This book is now available to purchase.

To continue: Irene Tresun was writing the histories of all past City Halls for the above work. It was either her idea or someone else on the Board to suggest that the LACHS City Hall poster should include drawings of all past official City Halls. This concept proved to give the present City Hall an historical value by placing its predecessors along with it. Therefore, the board went back to Herb and gave him the opportunity to research photographs of the prior institutions. He was able to attain

the photos and, along those lines, he found the locations of all the buildings. Herb then set forth and included the five previous government buildings in miniature in front of the present City Hall. These different structures defined the architecture of the times.

It should be noted that Herb had a love affair with downtown Los Angeles architecture, specifically the Civic Center, since the age of seven. This passion, along with drawing, as a youngster evolved into a lifetime need as an adult to continue this adulation and determination to replicate on paper what he had seen.

For a time, he put his dreams to rest while he was working and raising a family. But he did notice, during that time period, skyscrapers in Los Angeles were blooming all over the downtown area. Finally, in 1988, his desire returned again with overwhelming passion. He began drawing the skyscrapers he had recently noticed. Around 1996, he read an article by Cecilia Rasmussen in the *Sunday Los Angeles Times*. It was about the past City Halls in Los Angeles since the 1850s. After many starts, he completed his drawing and brought it to me in the City Archives.

Over the last 81 years of the current City Hall's existence, there have been many posters depicting its image. Some have been from photographs, while others have been seen in various other art forms. As stated above, the LACHS poster shows the current City Hall with drawings of all known past City Halls from 1853. From 1850 to 1853, the Common (City) Council rented three buildings to run government business. Where the remainder of City government held work schedules at that time could be a study for a Master's thesis or doctoral dissertation.

At the bottom of the poster is a legend, which includes explanations of all City Halls and the City seal; a map showing locations of the past buildings; and a diagram drawing of all City Halls in solid pastels with the dates of each in the above poster itself. The beautiful and informative legend was prepared by Raymond Kwan, City Council photographer.

A synopsis of the City Halls and City Seal from the legend follows:

1853: The Rocha Adobe City Hall.

The first owned City Hall sat on what is now Spring Street, previously known as New High Street and Primavera, then Spring Street. California was the 31st state in the Union, and the Rocha House was the first city-owned City Hall.

1859: Temple's City Market/City Hall

Also known as Clocktower Courthouse. Built by John Temple. Purchased by Los Angeles County, with the Common (City) Council meeting on the second floor.



1885: Second Street City Hall

Completed in 1885, it was on the north side of Second Street between Spring and Fort (now Broadway) Streets. The building became too small and four years later was moved again.

1889: Fort Street City Hall

Fort Street (now Broadway) City Hall had five stories with a very high tower at one corner. It resembled an Ivy League college.

1928: Spring Street City Hall

Voters approved a variance to allow this building to be 27 stories. It remained the tallest building in Los Angeles until 1965.

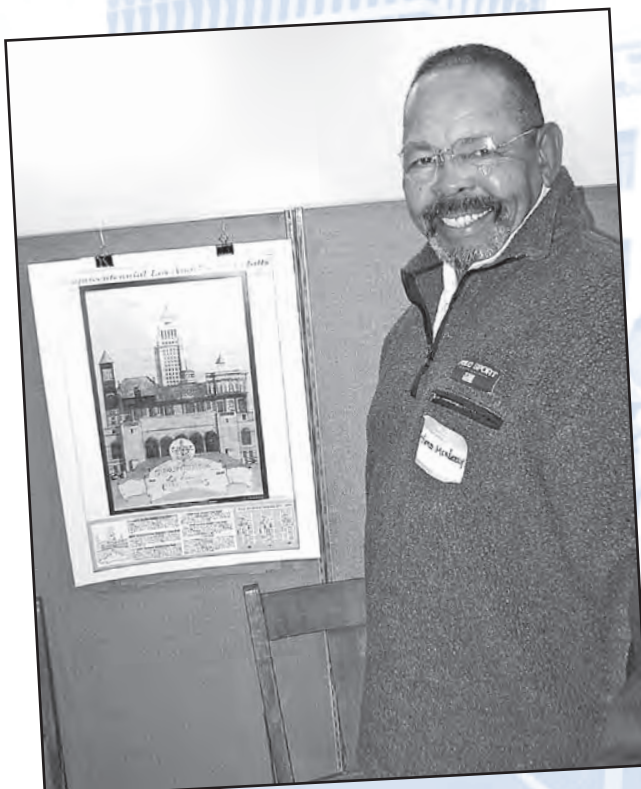
The City Seal

In 1905, Ordinance 10,834 authorized the current City seal. Prior to that date, the City's seal was a cluster of grapes. In 1905, the City Fathers felt that Los Angeles was more than an agrarian community.

These wonderful, colored posters come in two sizes. They make wonderful gifts and framed they look great in City offices. They can be purchased at the Club Store. The address is 120 W. Second St., about two blocks from City Hall. In a few weeks the Employees Club will have online order capabilities. If there are any complications, you may e-mail me at hyndarudd@att.net. Thank you.

The City Hall poster comes in two sizes, for \$10 and \$15. See page 51.

The City Hall poster is available at the Club Store.



Artist Herb McNeely looks over his poster.