

A History of Bastrop City Hall
904 Main Street
Bastrop, Texas

The current City Hall might not appear to be a particularly historic structure, but there is hardly a building and site in Bastrop that better symbolizes the continuing effort of the City to keep up with the times and growth of its community

The City Hall is situated on what was once the western end of Pine Street, one of the streets platted at the founding of the City. In the 1840s, Pine Street went to the riverⁱ and was one of three major streets that led to the ferries and natural springs along the river bank. Eventually, water wells were dug in town and Pine Street began to carry less and less traffic due to the construction of the first bridge in 1890 which crossed the Colorado River at Chestnut Street.

Four years later, in 1894, the City aldermen found another public use for Pine Street. A small building, “fireman’s hall,” was placed in the middle of the street. Council Minutes from Sept 2, 1894 read,

S. S. Sayers and forty-four other citizens of the City of Bastrop petitioned the council to remove the building known as firemans hall, (situated on J. C. Buchanan’s lot) to the West end of Pine Street. Council granted the petition and appointed a committee of aldermen to have the building moved to Pine Street, West of Main.

Fireman’s hall was a small structure that accommodated two hose carts, one hand engine, and a bell.ⁱⁱ The building did not fill the entire width of Pine Street. By 1920, the building had been expanded by approximately 10 feet and had become the center of City government. Besides serving as a City Hall, the building held the City’s legal documents and housed two fire trucks, several thousand feet of hose, and other fire fighting equipment.ⁱⁱⁱ Month by month the City Hall served local citizens, and was the location where all major decisions of Bastrop government were made. Periodically, these decisions were to expand and remodel the City Hall structure itself.

In 1930 complaints about the poor condition of the building prompted the city leaders to build a new City Hall together with a building to care for the “fire apparatus.” The Firemans Hall was completely demolished and a new building, a “one-story, Spanish type building of brick” was built in its place. It cost approximately \$7,500 and had an office for the Mayor, Council Chambers and the City Tax Collector. (The tax collector was also the City Marshal.)^{iv} The building was approximately 40 X 50 feet and filled most of Pine Street. It was moved back on the lot approximately 10 feet so that it was no longer flush with the other buildings which fronted on Main. Construction took three months, from July to October, 1930. There are no drawings or photographs of the building.

The contractor for the “Spanish type” building was A. J. Woehl who was known for quality workmanship. Throughout his career as a contractor, his work-crew was comprised of German craftsmen. Woehl was superintendent over construction at Camp Swift during WWII and was a partner with Joe Pheiffer on the construction of the Refectory in the Bastrop State Park during the CCC era.

The Spanish type building was remodeled 17 years later in 1947. The building was expanded to the West (rear) and to the South so that it became approximately 30 feet wider than Pine Street. A large storage space, a vault, florescent lighting, and an expanded council room were added. The new waiting room for the utility office included a public water cooler. Protruding decorative brick on the old exterior was shaved down and covered with cream-colored stucco. Once again, the building housed all the city departments and the Fire Department.^v

The architectural term given to the remodeled building was called Eclectic Modernistic. The style became popular world-wide during the 1930s and 1940s and was noted for its emphasis on smooth surfaces, horizontal lines, and a streamline look.^{vi} Bastrop officials boasted that the “city hall was more modern and complete than one in any other town of its size.” The November 21, 1947 issue of the Bastrop Advertiser wrote,

The City of Bastrop has a come a long way since it came into being, a tiny settlement on the banks of a river...Its history has always been built upon progress and accomplishment. Its achievements, both great and small have been many, and this is another to which its people may point with pride.

About 1995, the exterior was slightly changed when a slopped canopy was built across the front. A few years earlier, the bay doors had been removed when the fire department moved to Chestnut St. to make room for reconfigured council chambers and offices.

Today, 2008, the City of Bastrop has once again outgrown the City Hall building. After 115 years in the middle of Pine Street, and after many decades as the center of City government, it has become necessary to move City Hall to a new location. The 1300 block of Chestnut Street has been selected. Hopefully, the City will find another public use for the fine old building so that it can continue its important place in the history of Bastrop and the vitality of Main Street.

Robbie Sanders July, 2008

Endnotes

i. City Council Minutes, Volume A, June, 1847, pg. 183

ii. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1896, legend and drawing.

iii. Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. Map, 1921

iv. *Bastrop Advertiser*, “Work Started on City Hall,” July 14, 1930 and “Move into New City Hall,” November 21, 1947.

v. Blueprints - “Alterations and Additions to City Hall, City of Bastrop, Texas,” undated.

vi. Interview with Marvin E. Beck, AIA Ameritus, July 22, 2008