



SAN FRANCISCO  
**PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

- **Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century – Before the 1906 Earthquake and Fire**
  - **1849-1860s:** Yerba Buena Cemetery, San Francisco’s first municipal cemetery, begins operations on land that would later become Civic Center. Approximately 9,000 people were buried here beginning in 1849. By the mid-1860s, a cemetery was no longer desirable in this location, and the project of relocating bodies from Yerba Buena Cemetery to alternative sites began. By 1870, the cemetery was converted into Yerba Buena Park.
  - **1896:** The Pioneer Monument is installed at Marshall Square, a former park east of Larkin Street where the Public Library is now located.
  - **1897:** After 25 years of construction, San Francisco’s Old City Hall is completed. It collapsed nine years after its completion in the first 60 seconds of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.
  - **1899:** A fire fox system is installed in Civic Center and throughout the City. Using telegraph technology, the boxes remain active today. They are recognizable for their single red post topped with a small red and gold box.
  - **1905:** Architect and urban designer Daniel Burnham develops a plan for the City of San Francisco, including the Civic Center. The plan is inspired by L’Enfant’s Beaux Arts plan for Washington, DC. Though the plan is not immediately implemented, it would continue to guide the design of the Civic Center in the aftermath of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.
- **1906-1937: City Beautiful and the Beaux Arts**
  - **1906:** The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire devastates San Francisco. Nine years after its construction, old City Hall is destroyed by the disaster. (For more information, see [US Geological Survey overview](#) and [New York Times 1906 report](#).)

- **1909:** After the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, a gravity-fed Auxiliary Water Supply System is installed throughout the City consisting of underground piping and large hydrants above ground. 135 miles of piping remain in mostly usable condition today.
- **1912:** A new plan for Civic Center, based on the Burnham Plan, is approved and attributed to John Galen Howard.
- **1912:** Civic Center's oldest living tree, a Canary Island Date Palm, is planted in the Barbara Apartments courtyard on Franklin and McAllister Streets.
- **1913-1915:** The new City Hall and Exhibition Hall are constructed in Civic Center. While the Exhibition Hall opens in time for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, City Hall opens at the end of the year, just shy of the international fair.
- **1915:** San Francisco hosts the Panama-Pacific International Exposition—a world's fair held in San Francisco to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal. The event offered the City the opportunity to showcase its recovery from the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. The Exposition (Civic) Auditorium is completed in time for the Exposition, but City Hall does not open its doors until late December after the Exposition ended. (For more information, see [National Park Service overview](#) and [1915 Exposition brochure](#).)
- **1917:** The Public Library, now the Asian Art Museum, is constructed per the design of George Kelham.
- **1932-1936:** The Veterans' Building, the Opera House, and the War Memorial Court are completed. The War Memorial Court contains soils from various cities around the world where American battles have been fought.
- **1938-1961: World War II and Mid-Century Modern**
  - **1941-1946:** Hospitality House opens on Marshall Square with temporary barracks installed on Civic Center Plaza in order to house traveling soldiers during World War II. The Hospitality House is demolished in 1991.
  - **1945:** United Nations Conference is held at the War Memorial Complex to create and sign the United Nations Charter. (For more information, see [United Nations overview](#).)
  - **1951:** Treaty of San Francisco is hosted at the War Memorial Opera House officially ends WWII, creating a peace treaty between Japan and the United States. (See [Treaty of San Francisco text](#).)
  - **1958-1961:** Civic Center Plaza is demolished for the building of the underground Brooks Hall and Civic Center Parking Garage.
  - **1960:** House Un-American Activities Committee hearings and protests occur at City Hall. (For more information, see [PBS summary of the events](#).)
  - **1961:** The Civic Center Plaza landscape design by Douglas Baylis is constructed above the underground Brooks Hall and the Civic Center Parking Garage.
- **Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century to Present**
  - **1975:** United Nations Plaza, a 1-acre pedestrian plaza between Civic Center and Market Street, commemorates the founding of the United Nations Charter at the War Memorial Complex in 1945.
  - **1978:** Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone are shot at City Hall by former Supervisor Dan White.
  - **1979:** Former Supervisor Dan White is convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to only seven years in jail, igniting protests in the Castro District, later called the White Night Riots. The protests culminate at the steps of City Hall. (For more information, see [University of Massachusetts at Lowell summary of the events](#).)

- **1980:** Designed by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall opens, replacing the athletic fields of the former High School of Commerce and anchoring the western corner of Civic Center.
- **1984:** Venezuela presents the Simon Bolivar Monument as a gift to San Francisco on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1984. The Monument sits at the western edge of United Nations Plaza, looking towards City Hall.
- **1986:** Edmund G. Brown State Office Building is completed. It is designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to echo Davies Symphony Hall with semi-circular curbs and a triple tiered façade.
- **1980s:** Heart of the City Farmers' Market begins hosting a weekly farmers' market in UN Plaza.
- **1989:** The 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake hits San Francisco, causing damage to all of the major historic buildings in Civic Center, including City Hall, the Exposition (Civic) Auditorium, the Department of Public Health Building, the War Memorial Opera House and Veterans Building, and the former San Francisco Public Library (now the Asian Art Museum ). In 2013, the Federal Building was the latest Civic Center building to be seismically upgraded.
- **1993:** Construction of the new main library on the former Marshall Square block begins. The Pioneer Monument is relocated from Marshall Square to its current location in the center of the Fulton Street Mall, north of the Public Library.
- **1993-1994 and 1999:** Children's playgrounds are built on the southeast and northeast corners of Civic Center Plaza.
- **2003:** Former public library is rehabilitated to become Asian Art Museum.
- **2014:** Rehabilitation of the War Memorial Court begins to address drainage issues, to design American Disabilities Act-compliant paths, and to install a new memorial. The court was originally designed by Thomas Church in 1936 and is part of San Francisco Landmark #84. Church's original design included a designated space for a Veteran's Memorial that was never built and a new memorial will be installed as part of the rehabilitation project.