

2022 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Old Orange County Courthouse



Designed by Charles L. Strange in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, popular for government buildings at the end of the 19th century, the Old Orange County Courthouse was completed in 1901 and was home to the county's Superior Court until 1968. Between 1983-92, the Old Courthouse underwent seismic upgrades and a restoration project that restored the building's public spaces to their original 1901 appearance. The building is designated a California State Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As the surrounding area developed into a modern civic center complex with new construction, the unchanging, red Arizona sandstone façade of the Old Courthouse emerged as an iconic Orange County government landmark.

Exposure to the elements for over a century had begun to take their toll on the façade, and portions of the sandstone surface showed signs of significant erosion, cracking, and in some extreme cases had fallen off the building. Left unchecked this would present not only the loss of a defining feature of the Old Orange County Courthouse but a safety hazard to the public.

The rehabilitation project's goal was to provide needed repairs and maintenance to the historic building all in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards. In 2015, Phase I survey work documented the extent of the façade damage. Core samplings were taken from the south facade to learn more about the composition

and condition of the sandstone. In 2017, repairs to the South Façade, which had the most damage, were completed. In 2020, Phase II utilized the lessons learned from the South Façade to extend repair work to the remaining three facades. All work was completed while the building was fully occupied and in use. The repair consisted of concrete bond beam, historical wood windows, and transom stone ledges on the third floor; securing and patching the sandstone façade and window ledges; cleaning, repairing, resealing, and repainting all the wood windows on three floors; and replacing copper roofing and drain at the decorative stone balcony.

The Old Orange County Courthouse is the oldest government-built building still in use in Orange County. Originally the tallest building in the county when it opened in 1901, the Old County Courthouse has survived not only natural disasters but the constant redevelopment as the county transitioned from rural agriculture to the urban development of today. The Courthouse serves as a physical reminder of the county's founding and is much beloved by the community. Many residents have memories of visiting the courthouse to get married or learn about local history. This project not only repaired damage to the stone façade, but also will allow this iconic government building to continue serving the public for decades to come.