

The Orange County Civic Center

Santa Ana was chosen as our county seat in 1889, when Orange County was created. The first county offices were located in two store buildings on East Fourth Street, with a single courtroom upstairs.

The Civic Center began with the purchase of a courthouse site in 1893. The first building on the site was the county jail, completed in 1897.

The Old Orange County Courthouse was completed in 1901, and served as the center of county government until the 1960s.

As the county grew, county government grew with it, and additional buildings were built around the Old Courthouse.

The first plan for a Civic Center was prepared by the City of Santa Ana in 1927. It ran north from the Old Courthouse to Tenth Street, and included sites for a museum, amphitheatre, and park.

But instead, growth began to the west with the construction of the Santa Ana Municipal Bowl in the early 1930s. During World War II, the West Coast Army Air Corps Training Center was built adjoining the Bowl.

The Civic Center idea was revived in 1945 as a joint project of the County of Orange and the City of Santa Ana. New plans were drawn running west of the Old Courthouse, and the city and county began buying up land in the area.

A complete Civic Center plan, with a unified architectural theme, was developed in 1952, and ground was broken on the Civic Center's first new building a year later.

But funding the Civic Center project proved challenging. Over the next ten years, local voters turned down three successive bond acts. In the meantime, the county converted a number of homes and churches it had purchased in the Civic Center area into offices and courtrooms.

Finally, in 1966, the city and county formed a Civic Center Authority, which arranged for the financing of the modern Courthouse. By 1980, most of the original Civic Center area had been developed.

Today, county government has outgrown the Civic Center, with county facilities located throughout the county. But the Civic Center remains the heart of Orange County government.