

# A Magnificent Affair



Photo by Bernie Goldstein

## Feats of Clay

The brilliant white “skin” of the courthouse – 3,600 tiles, dozens of friars’ heads, massive Doric columns and Roman arch windows and pediment ornaments – is made of terra-cotta (Italian for “baked clay”).

The historic Gladding, McBean plant, established in 1875 in Lincoln, California produced this popular beaux-art substitute for stone blocks. Today’s employees continue time-honored craftsmanship and expertise for handmade creations of sand and clay beaten, kneaded, placed in molds, glazed and fired at very high temperatures, most recently producing duplicates to replace cracked tiles during City Hall’s 2004-2005 terra-cotta restoration. Dozens of terra-cotta heads depicting the Franciscan friars enliven the neoclassical façade’s arched windows atop the keystones.



California State Archives glass negatives of early company projects include Ventura’s terra-cotta friars and courthouse lintel

## Entries of Bronze

Four medallions with initials SBCH for San Buena Ventura Court House and eight with lima bean bouquets entwine the handsome retractable bronze entry gates. Above the gates seven more lima bean bunches dangle from heraldic shields – four in terra cotta outside and three carved in wood inside the courtroom – as a reminder that Ventura County’s then chief cash crop largely paid for the munificence of the building. City Hall West’s 1932 bronze doors depict citrus groves and oil fields (major mid-century industries) below the 1782 Mission and the 1542 flagship **San Salvador** of first California explorer Juan Cabrillo.

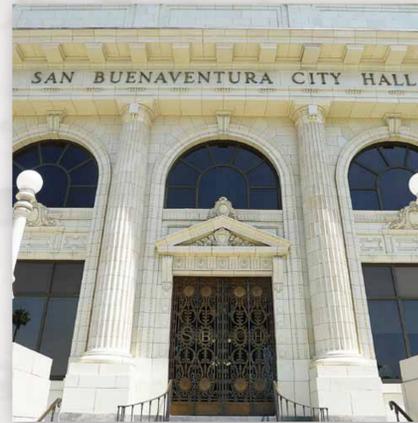


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Photo courtesy of the Cynthia Thompson Archives

## Halls of Marble

Joseph Musto & Sons-Keenan Co. of San Francisco’s steam-powered marble sawmill cut blocks down the middle, as if opening a book, to create the building’s remarkable book-match panels, where vein patterns on one slab mirror its twin. The company founder was born near Italy’s Carrara quarries, the source of the courthouse marble. The twenty-foot vestibule is a masterpiece of rare statuario venato (veined statuary), nero portoro (black and gold) and gold calacata. The marble opulence continues in the foyer with its sweeping bifurcating staircase and corridors.



Photo courtesy of the Cynthia Thompson Archives

## Celestial Coffered Ceilings

Intricately worked plaster friezes of scallop shells, acanthus leaves, fruit-and-vegetable garlands and ripe vineyards accentuate Art Nouveau style chandeliers, fixtures and backlit panels.

