

---

## CIRCUIT CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL OF SAN FRANCISCO COURTHOUSE

---

The Ninth Circuit in 2005 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the James R. Browning United States Courthouse in San Francisco, one of the nation's most beautiful public buildings and the survivor of two devastating earthquakes. The centennial was twice celebrated by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, most notably with a major public event held 100 years to the day the building opened as a courthouse and post office on August 29, 1905. The court also marked the milestone in January with a reception for judges and others attending the Federal Judicial Center's Mid-Winter Workshop in San Francisco.

Now on the National Register of Historic Places and eligible for national historical landmark status, the granite-clad, four-story courthouse is considered a prime example of *Beaux Arts* classical architecture popular for government buildings at the turn of the century. The interior is finished in marble and features intricately handcrafted mosaics and plasterwork by master craftsmen and artisans. Designed by James Knox Taylor, the supervising architect of the Department of the Treasury, it was originally intended to house a post office, courthouse and other federal agencies. It was built over seven years at a cost of \$2.5 million, the equivalent of about \$50 million today.

The building survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, but was seriously damaged during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. After extensive repairs, including seismic retrofitting to withstand future temblors, the building reopened in 1997 for use by the court of appeals. It was renamed in November 2004 in honor of Chief Judge Emeritus James R. Browning, one of the nation's longest serving federal judges and an architect of the modern federal court system in the West.

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco and Senator



---

*Senior Circuit Judge James R. Browning is greeted by (from left) Chief Judge Mary M. Schroeder, U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, and Senior Circuit Judge Dorothy W. Nelson at the rededication of the 100-year-old courthouse that bears his name.*

---

Max Baucus of Montana led the list of distinguished guests for the August event. Rep. Pelosi was the keynote speaker, while Sen. Baucus made a special presentation recognizing the courthouse's namesake and a fellow Montanan, Judge Browning. A letter of congratulations from Sen. Barbara Boxer of California also was read during the ceremonies.

The House Minority Leader, Rep. Pelosi was instrumental



*Left: Circuit Judge Marsha Berzon addresses the crowd during the Centennial celebration. Below: Actor Keith McGough portrayed President Teddy Roosevelt, who originally dedicated the building in 1905.*



in obtaining federal funding to rebuild the courthouse following the devastation by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. She also authored the bill signed into law last year naming the courthouse for the long-serving and widely respected Judge Browning.

“Though the 1989 earthquake shook our city, the magnificent Browning courthouse bent, but did not break,” said Rep. Pelosi. “Together, we worked to strengthen the foundation, to restore its beauty and make it one of the first historic and technologically smart buildings in the country. Today this courthouse and its resplendent architecture are great sources of civic pride.”

The special presentation recognized the enduring legacy of Judge Browning, 86, renowned as a jurist who has helped define the law and as an extraordinary administrator whose reforms and innovations launched the federal courts into the information age.

“When I think of Judge Browning, I think of his continually upbeat, positive, can-do approach,” said Sen. Baucus, who helped pass legislation in the Senate renaming the building after Browning. “I think of his razor-sharp legal skills. And I think of his sense of humor and that smile.”

Nominated by President John F. Kennedy, Judge Browning came onto the bench in 1961 and served as an active judge through 2000, the longest active tenure of any judge in Ninth Circuit history. He was chief judge from 1976 to 1988, the second-longest tenure of any chief judge in circuit history.

Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Mary M. Schroeder, fellow Circuit Judges Marsha S. Berzon, Carlos T. Bea and Dorothy W. Nelson, and General Services Administrator Stephen A. Perry also participated in the August program, along with a number of special guests.

“This building is one of the wonders of the West and more than deserving of this special recognition. We are deeply honored to occupy it,” Judge Schroeder said in welcoming several hundred guests.

The festivities had a turn-of-the-century feel thanks to rousing John Phillip Sousa marches performed by the Golden Gate Park Band, which has been entertaining audiences in San Francisco since 1882, and costumed speakers portraying important historical figures. President Theodore Roosevelt, who held office when the courthouse first opened in 1905, was portrayed by professional actor Keith McGough, while the role of Judge William W. Morrow, who helped raise funds for

construction and presided over the dedication of the building, was undertaken by Ninth Circuit Judge Sidney R. Thomas of Billings, Mont.

Providing further historical context were remarks by Professor William Deverell, director of the Institute on California and the West at the University of Southern California; and Chief District Judge Vaughn R. Walker of the Northern District of California. The district was located in the courthouse until 1964. The program concluded with historical re-enactments of early cases heard by the circuit and district courts.

Costumed docents led visitors on tours of the building's magnificent courtrooms, judicial chambers and halls. Special exhibits sponsored by the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society detailed the long careers and varied contributions of Judge Browning and the late Judge Richard H. Chambers, another former chief judge who obtained many of the courthouse's current furnishings.

The U.S. Postal Service, whose workers saved the courthouse from fire after the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906, also had a display and provided guests with commemorative envelopes bearing the historic cancellation date. The post office moved from the building following the 1989 earthquake.

The Federal Judicial Center reception in January was highlighted by the participation of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who presented a program on music and the law, and also helped dedicate chambers originally intended for the use of a Supreme Court justice while "riding the circuit." She presided over a ceremony unveiling a plaque donated by the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society designating Room 329 as the "Historic Supreme Court Circuit Justice Chambers." The chambers were included in the courthouse design, but were never used for their intended purpose before the practice of riding circuit officially ended in 1911. 🍂



*Senior District Judge William Shubb of Sacramento describes the exhibit he put together on the San Francisco Seals and other baseball teams that were active in the early 1900s.*



*Senator Max Baucus (far right) joined fellow Montanans Circuit Judge Sidney Thomas and Senior Circuit Judge James R. Browning at the Centennial festivities in August.*



---

*In honor of the Centennial, docents, guests, and court employees wore costumes similar to the dress of the early 20th century, when the U.S. post office and courthouse opened at Seventh and Mission streets in San Francisco.*

---



---

*District Judge Charles Breyer (far right) gives testimony in a re-enactment of the U.S. v. Ah Sou case as part of the courthouse Centennial program at the Federal Judicial Center's Mid-Winter Workshop held in January 2005.*

---