

# Sacramento Water Works recognized as a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark

9/19/2022



The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Sacramento Section recognized the City of Sacramento Water Works a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. The landmark, which was completed in 1854, was recognized at a dedication ceremony at the Sacramento History Museum led by ASCE's Sacramento Section, which is celebrating its centennial anniversary of the Section's founding. The section was joined by Ken Rosenfield, director, ASCE Region 9 and Chuck Spinks, chair, Region 9 History and Heritage Committee.

ASCE represents more than 150,000 members of the civil engineering profession worldwide. It is the oldest national engineering society in the United States. ASCE recognizes historically significant civil engineering projects, structures, and sites all over the world. More than 280 projects have earned the prestigious title for creativity and innovation, and almost all are executed under challenging conditions.

The City of Sacramento Water Works was the first municipal, city-owned water system west of the Mississippi River. This project was inspired by a disastrous fire in 1852 that destroyed 27 blocks in Sacramento and the city did not have a water system capable of putting out fires. The water works site was equipped with a distribution system with hydrants that could fight fires.

"Communities often don't recognize the vital importance of civil engineering works until they are faced with monumental challenges, which is exactly what took place in Sacramento during the 1850s," said Dennis D. Truax, ASCE president. "Construction of the water works building not only addressed the omnipresent threat of fires in the city, but also paved the way for expansion of the city. Works such as these exemplify what is possible when communities choose to prioritize vital infrastructure projects."

The Sacramento Water Works building stored 200,000 gallons of water at the top of the structure. The rest of the building served as a place for city hall offices, the municipal court, and the city jail. The Sacramento History Museum now stands in its place, appearing as a replica of the original structure.

"The Sacramento Section of ASCE takes great pride in recognizing the Sacramento Water Works as an ASCE Historic Civil Engineering Landmark," said Dennis Gatchalian, president, Sacramento Section of ASCE. "The Water Works building led the way for the rapid development of the City of Sacramento, contributed to the reduction of large fire risk, and provided residents with piped water to where they lived and work."

The City of Sacramento Water Works was nominated by the ASCE Sacramento Section Centennial Committee. For more information about ASCE's Historic Civil Engineering Landmark Program, go to <https://www.asce.org/about-civil-engineering/history-and-heritage/historic-landmarks>.



Photo: City of Sacramento

# HISTORIC CIVIL ENGINEERING LANDMARK



## SACRAMENTO WATER WORKS

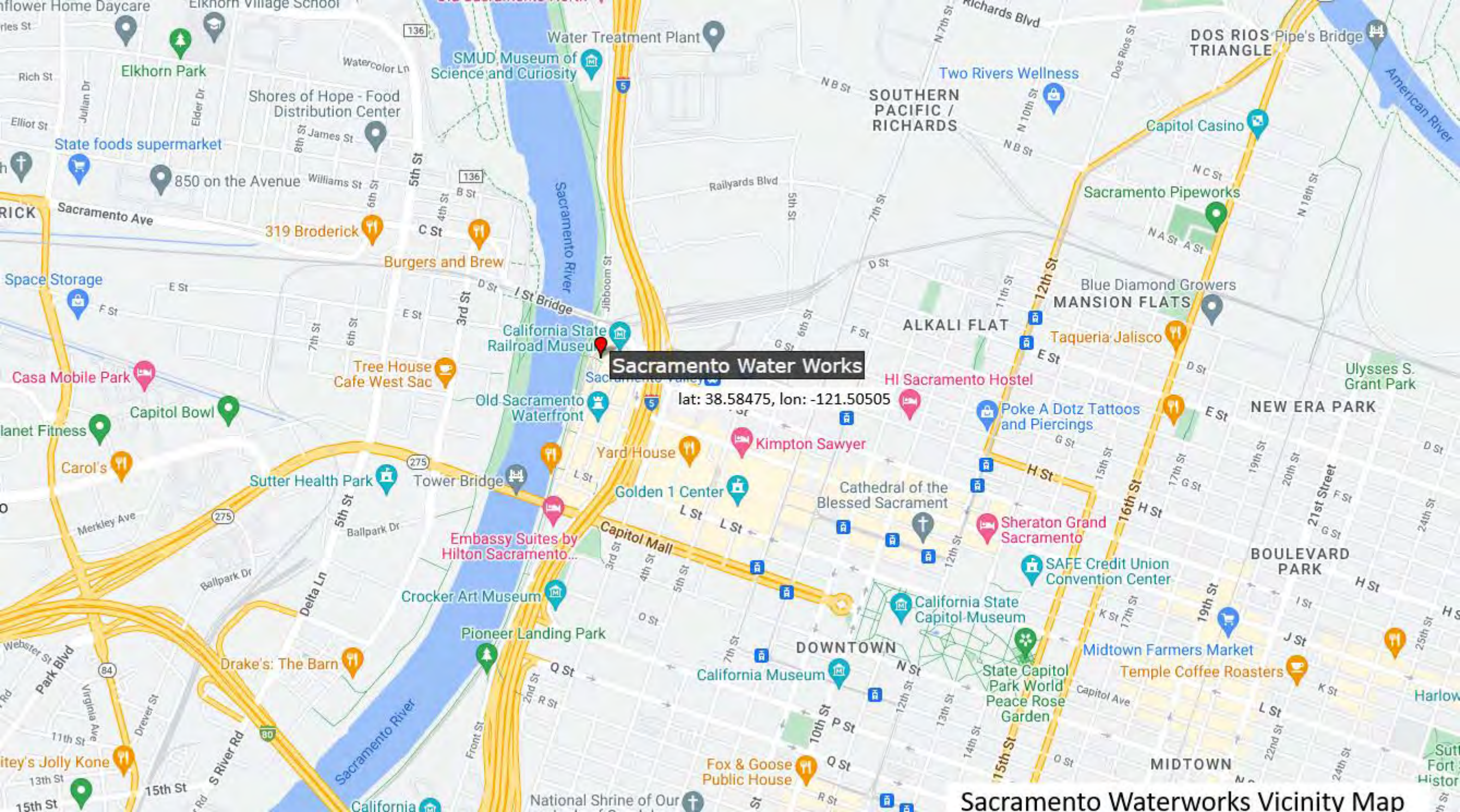
COMPLETED IN APRIL 1854, THE CITY OF SACRAMENTO'S WATER WORKS WAS THE FIRST MUNICIPAL, CITY-OWNED WATER SYSTEM WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER. BEFORE THE MUNICIPAL SYSTEM WAS BUILT, THE RESIDENTS OF THE CITY OF SACRAMENTO WERE PROVIDED WATER FROM INDIVIDUAL PROVIDERS WITH HORSE-DRAWN WAGONS SELLING WATER BY THE GALLON. THE DISASTROUS FIRE ON NOVEMBER 2ND, 1852 THAT DESTROYED 27 BLOCKS IN SACRAMENTO CONVINCED THE CITIZENS TO TAX THEMSELVES TO PAY FOR A DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM WITH HYDRANTS THAT COULD HELP FIGHT FIRES. THE WATER WORKS BUILDING HAD A 240,000-GALLON RESERVOIR ON THE TOP OF THE BUILDING, WITH THE SPACE BELOW OCCUPIED BY CITY HALL OFFICES FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS, THE MUNICIPAL COURT, AND THE CITY JAIL.

Completed: 1854

Designated: February 2022

## 1854 City Hall and Waterworks

The original building was completed in the spring of 1854 at a cost of \$120,000. It housed the City Waterworks, its Superintendent and Tapper, and the City offices for Mayor, Council, Secretary, Marshall, Police, Collector, Assessor, Surveyor, and Recorder, including the courtroom, jury room, sleeping quarters for policemen, and City Jail.



**Sacramento Water Works**

lat: 38.58475, lon: -121.50505

**Sacramento Waterworks Vicinity Map**



Railroad Turntable & Roundhouse

Level 1  
California State Railroad Museum  
Antique locomotives, rides & more

Sacramento History Museum  
Regional heritage & Gold Rush exhibits

Underground Tours

Big Four Building

Sacramento Southern Railroad

California State Railroad Museum Library

Old Sacramento State Historic Park

Old Sacramento City Garage

Sacramento River Bike Trail  
American Riv Bike Trl

Sacramento River Bike Trail

Sacramento River Bike Trail

Sacramento River Bike Trail

Sacramento River Bike Trail

Front St

Front St

1st

1st

1st

1st

1st

2nd St

1st Bridge

1st Bridge

1st Bridge

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SACRAMENTO  
HISTORY MUSEUM

American Society of Civil Engineers  
Sacramento Section

**Local Historic Civil Engineering Landmark**

**Waterworks Building**

**References**

[Sacramento Water Works](#)  
HMDB.org

[Documentary History of American Water-works](#)  
Source

[This new historic landmark celebrates the City's original Waterworks](#)  
Sacramento City Express