

**BRANTFORD
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT**

**BY
ROBERT L. DEBOER**

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BRANTFORD

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INTRODUCTION

On December 6th, 1986, I met Mayor David Neumann at the Brantford Farmer's Market. During conversation, the subject of the Capitol Theatre came up. He suggested that it would be appropriate if someone were to research the history of the Performing Arts and Entertainment as they existed in Brantford prior to and shortly after the turn of the century. He expressed the opinion that it would be particularly applicable at the present with the Capitol Theatre being rejuvenated as a Community Arts and Entertainment Centre.

My wife and I wholeheartedly support the revitalization of the Capitol Theatre. As a result of this support and my historical interests, I decided to embark upon the required research. I discovered that Brantford has a remarkable and significant cultural history, dating from the late 1820's and continuing virtually unabated for in excess of one hundred years. Unfortunately, live theatre in Brantford was destined to meet its demise in 1929 with the introduction of talkie movies.

Brantford had numerous entertainment halls and operatic facilities during this era. A restored and revitalized Capitol Theatre will create new interest in live theatre and would be an investment in the City's cultural future. It will fill a long existing void and recreate the aura and excitement which once existed of witnessing a live performance on stage. The possibilities and opportunities for the future are limitless.

Marian Beckett, Chairman of the Capitol Theatre Steering Committee, has predicted that the Capitol Theatre will be "The Centre of Brantford's Night Life". The Theatre Manager, Pat Marcotte has brought to the Capitol stage a variety of first class entertainment, ranging from Country Western to Broadway to Rock and Roll. Downtown Brantford is currently experiencing a revitalization in development of which the Capitol is and must continue to be a part, adding its own cultural appeal.

The Capitol Theatre has charisma and appeal, quality entertainment is being made available at a reasonable price and the facility is conveniently located. The potential is there for a success story. The critical ingredient necessary to complete this story and to make Marian Beckett's prediction a reality - Community Support!

Robert L. Deboer
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PRIMARY SOURCES

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- Articles by John Merriman published in The Brant News, Brantford, Ontario
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- The History of The County of Brant Ontario, Warner, Beers & Co. Toronto, 1883
- Personal Reflections of Miss Melita Raymond, Brantford, Ontario
- Personal Reflections of Mr. and Mrs. Harold White, Brantford, Ontario
- Personal Reflections of Mrs. Harold (Ellen) Vansickle, Brantford, Ontario
- Records on file at the Brant County Museum, Brantford, Ontario
- A Musical History of Brant County - Experience '80 by Barry Devereaux and Susan Edmondson
- Musical Brantford by Ralph H. Reville as published in The Brantford Expositor Souvenir Number, July 1st, 1927
- All That Glitters: A Memorial To Ottawa's Capitol Theatre And Its Predecessors by Hilary Russell
- Opening Week Program - Temple Theatre - December 22nd, 1919

BRANTFORD

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

On October 2nd, 1986, theatre goers and patrons of the arts of Brantford and area gave an enthusiastic welcome to the live and powerful presentation of the Musical "Evita" by the Limelight Dinner Theatre Company of Toronto, in the Capitol Theatre. In addition to enjoying an evening of splendid entertainment, those in attendance also witnessed the rebirth of the Capitol as Brantford's Arts and Entertainment Centre thereby returning to its roots and filling a long standing void during which live theatre was absent from the entertainment scene in Brantford. This absence resulted from the conversion of the Capitol to a talkie movie theatre on May 29th, 1929, at which time it was known as the Temple Theatre. Talkie movies ended the Temple's era of Vaudeville and live entertainment which had supplemented silent films presented in the theatre and also brought about the demise of live entertainment as presented in the Grand Opera House, formerly located at West and Darling Streets, the current location of the Salvation Army Citadel.

The Temple Theatre, which originally opened on December 22nd, 1919, was billed as "Brantford's Supreme Playhouse" and continued the tradition of live theatre established here in the late 1820's. At that time, exhibitions and entertainers coming to Brantford and requiring a hall, were allowed to astonish and delight the natives in the little old school house that stood on the Market Square where the Eaton Market Square Complex now stands. This school was started about 1826 and served a multitude of purposes, including Civic Hall, Court Room, place of entertainment and meeting house.

The citizens of Brantford, since its earliest beginnings, have had a close association with music and the performing arts. This is confirmed by an article written by Ralph H. Reville and published in a Souvenir Edition of the Brantford Expositor on July 1st, 1927. Mr. Reville stated in part as follows:

Although it cannot be claimed that Brantford, the past fifty years has taken an outstanding place along musical lines, compared with one or two of the larger centres in the Province, it can be claimed and claimed justly, that this pre-eminently manufacturing city has always most favourably compared musically, with places of the same, or even larger size in its production and patronage of the very best attainable in vocal, instrumental and concerted endeavour. Her people have always extended generous support and encouragement to the interpreters of the Chief of Muses. This possibly is due to the fact that the early residents were largely comprised of people from the motherland, steeped in the tradition, more or less of their church music

and with a great love for oratorio, then at its zenith, and part and folk song. Half a century and more ago, the churches and church concerts were almost entirely responsible for the musical pabulum, supplied the people of the town. Popular songs were few, musical comedy of the scintillating Gilbert and Sullivan type, were of course unknown. That came later as a blessed relief. The jazz orchestra, and the older residents ought to be thankful for that, was still nearly fifty years away, and the radio and other mechanical musical disseminating marvels of today, were unthought of and undreamed about. The church and the home were really the musical centres of the town. The churches to some extent, and to some extent only, still hold their own. The home, alas, is no longer a dominant factor in music in this city or for that matter any other city.

There is little doubt, as indicated by Mr. Reville, that the musical inclination shown by Brantford's early residents resulted from their British Ancestry, a traditional church background and a great love of music, much of it instilled in the home. It is of interest to note that at the time of Mr. Reville's article in 1927, that the home had lost its dominance as a factor in music and the Church's influence was waning, a trend which appears to have continued.

Many of the families connected with Brantford's first Church, Grace Anglican, were musically inclined and likely promoted and actively encouraged community support in their endeavours. These included the Church's first Rector, Canon Usher, who was appointed in 1836, his wife and four children, all of whom sang in the Church Choir and were accomplished musicians, Major Lemmon, proprietor of the Courier, one of Brantford's early newspapers, his sister Mrs. Dacres Hart and the Mockridge Family, all of whom were exceptionally gifted, both vocally and instrumentally. Canon Usher organized Brantford's first singing Society, The Brantford Choral Union, which did much for music in the then small town.

In Brantford's early days, vocal and instrumental performances would likely have been presented to the general public in the only facilities available, the old Market Square School House and the Church Sanctuary. As time progressed and travelling entertainers and operatic troupes came into a position of prominence, public entertainment halls, although likely limited in what they were able to provide in the way of accommodation, became available.

73RD REGIMENT OF REGULARS

Possibly the first record of a public entertainment facility in

Brantford was a makeshift theatre improvised by the Soldiers and Officers of the 73rd Regiment of Regulars in the upstairs portion of a frame building that stood in the block encompassed by Dalhousie, Market, Darling and George Streets, when they were stationed here in 1837-38 during the MacKenzie Rebellion.

BRANTFORD'S FIRST LICENCED ENTERTAINMENT

The first record of any licenced entertainment in Brantford is contained in the following resolution passed by the Town Council in March of 1848:

"Moved by Mr. Down and second by Mr. Clement. Resolved that Mr. Samuel Thrift be allowed to perform for gain in this town, his recitations, dances, etc., for two nights only, viz on the 27th and 28th instant, upon payment of ten shillings by way of licence".

TOWN HALL

In 1850, the Town Hall, which had been erected on the Market Square the previous year, became Brantford's first community amusement centre and remained as such for some five years.

On October 21st, 1853, a Concert was held in the Town Hall during which a renowned European Harpist, Boscha, "The Father of the Harp", made an appearance. One of the numbers which he performed was a Grand March which he had composed for Napoleon in 1809.

This building remained in use as Brantford's City Hall until December of 1964 when it was vacated and subsequently demolished the following year. This property was used as a municipal parking lot until construction of the Eaton Market Square Complex commenced in 1985.

KERBY HOUSE HALL/PALMER'S HALL

Early in 1855, an advertisement for Brantford's newly completed hotel, the Kerby House, which was located on Colborne Street at George Street, where the Eaton Store is presently located, was published in The Conservative Expositor and stated as follows:

There is also in connection with the House, a fine Hall, 100 feet by 40! And twenty feet high suitable for Concerts and Public Exhibitions and Lighted with Gas".

On March 12th, 1855, the "Kerby House Hall" was licenced as a place of entertainment. This facility was Brantford's "Opera House" in those days, where all musical and theatrical performances were staged. In 1872, Mr. J.C. Palmer became the proprietor of the Kerby House and the entertainment facility became known as "Palmer's Hall". The Hall was located at the rear of the hotel and was described as rather a fearsome place with access being gained by way of a long wooden stairway which was slippery and dangerous in the winter. The stage is reported to have been of crude construction with smelly oil lamps being pressed into service as foot-lights and with scenery that only bore that name out of courtesy. Although a veritable fire trap, it was fortunate that for many years it served the town without any accident or panic ever being recorded. It is also reported that it witnessed some quite enjoyable productions, notably, the Holman Opera Company, headed by Sallie, Julia and Alfred Holman, the leading professional company touring Canada at that time. Sallie Holman was the possessor of a truly remarkable voice, one which would have earned her world fame if she had been placed in the proper musical environment. The Holman's annual visit to Brantford was always keenly anticipated. Mr. Palmer, upon acquiring the Hotel, apparently introduced the stage, as well as drop curtains and the scenery, such as it was, to the Hall. Palmer's Hall continued in operation until 1881 when Stratford's Opera House opened, at which time the Hall was converted to Hotel bedrooms.

There is every indication that the Kerby House Hall/Palmer's Hall actively promoted the performing arts to the citizens of Brantford with the presentation of both professional and amateur artists, including vocal and instrumental music, classical concerts, operas, dramatic readings, church benefits and lectures. Attendance at the various functions would likely have been reasonable since it would have been the sole source of entertainment in Brantford from 1855 until 1866 when Ker's Music Hall was established.

During the late 1850's, one of Brantford's earlier bands, the Philharmonic, performed in the Kerby Hall on a regular basis. Brantford's early firefighters sponsored benefit concerts in the Kerby Hall, including one on April 30th, 1858, when the Firemen apparently appeared in their regalia and again on February 11th, 1861 when the Washington Independent Engine Company, under the leadership of Ignatius Cockshutt, presented a musical festival. The proceeds from the festival were apparently applied to paying off the mortgage on the fire engine.

It is of interest to note that Thomas D'arcy McGee, Esq., M.P.P., one of the Fathers of Confederation, delivered a Public Lecture on the subject of Robert Burns and Thomas Moore in the Kerby Hall on April 4th and 11th, 1859, with the proceeds being applied to liquidate a debt which had been contracted in purchasing a new cemetery in the Town of Brantford.

It is also of interest to note that a Mr. Phillips delivered a Lecture on Phrenology on November 26th, 1860 in the Kerby Hall. Phrenology is described as the study of the skull based on the belief that it is indicative of mental faculties and character which he illustrated by a comparison of the Political Lives and Phrenological Character of William Lyon McKenzie, Francis Hincks, Rev. Dr. Ryerson and the Lord Bishop of Toronto. It was billed as being entertaining as well as instructive and a Lecture to which an audience can listen.

On April 16th, 1865, Dramatic Readings for the benefit of the Church being erected on the Six Nations Reservation, were presented in the Kerby Hall by Archdeacon Nelles of His Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks. The program also included a vocal music presentation by local amateurs.

In the late 1870's, the Brantford Philharmonic Society, one of the town's earliest string ensembles, was formed under the direction of Edward Kimpton, Choirmaster at Grace Church. Practice sessions were held in Wickcliffe Hall and an annual Recital was presented in Palmer's Hall. Among its members, the Society counted several members of the Bell family, including Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, who was a cellist.

BRANT HOUSE CONCERT ROOM

The Brant House Concert Room, of which little is actually known, was located in the Brant House Hotel, on the south west corner of King and Dalhousie Streets from 1859 until 1871 and was utilized from time to time for entertainment of one kind or another.

KER'S MUSIC HALL

In 1866, the most ambitious move chronicled in the way of an amusement place was inaugurated by Mr. James Ker, a local grain dealer. At a cost of \$15,000, he built "Ker's Music Hall" at 138-140 Colborne Street, which would have been on the north side of Colborne

Street midway in the block between Queen and Market Streets.

The Grand Trunk Railway Band, an early Brantford band, consisting of some twenty pieces, both brass and reed instruments, performed in Ker's Music Hall under the leadership of R. Quilly. It was formed in the 1860's under the direction of Tom Paterson, a foreman of the Grand Trunk locomotive works.

The Holman Opera Company, which had entertained the citizens of Brantford regularly in the Kerby House Hall for a number of years, commenced performances in the Ker facility.

Benefit Concerts were held in the Ker facility with the proceeds being applied for various purposes. One such Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music was presented on April 24th, 1867, benefitting the Mechanics Institute and Literary Association, the forerunner of today's Brantford Public Library. A Benefit with the proceeds being applied to the cost of erecting a Parsonage near the Mohawk Church on the Six Nations Reservation was presented on September 30th, 1867, with Dramatic Readings by Archdeacon Nelles of His Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks.

Apparently attractions in those days were difficult to acquire and those that did come were not as a rule overwhelmed by patrons. It appears likely that the Kerby House Hall which had been established for some time, would likely have provided competition for the newly established Music Hall, thereby effecting attendance. Mr. Ker subsequently entered into negotiations with the Baptists of the Town who had apparently expressed interest in the building. In 1868, he sold the Music Hall to them for the sacrifice price of \$5,000, experiencing a loss of \$10,000 over the short period of time during which he had operated it. Although the Music Hall became the property of the Baptists, it continued to function as an entertainment centre until around 1871.

DRILL SHED - ALEXANDRA PARK

This large frame building was erected by the Government for the use of the Dufferin Rifles as a Drill Shed. It was located on the north or Dalhousie Street side of Alexander Park which in those days was known as the "East Brantford Market Square". The Drill Shed was also utilized as a place of entertainment. This is confirmed by an advertisement published in The Brantford Expositor on June 18th, 1869, announcing that The Brantford Choral Union was holding a Concert in the Drill Shed on July 1st, 1869, likely to

commemorate Canada's second birthday. Around 1880, the roof of the Drill Shed was blown off during a violent windstorm and as a result it was subsequently demolished.

THE TABERNACLE

The former Ker's Music Hall, which was purchased by the Baptists from James Ker in 1868, became a place of worship known as "The Tabernacle". On July 8th, 1870, it was announced in The Brantford Expositor that Second Baptist Church (now Park Baptist) was meeting for public worship in Ker's Music Hall. For about three years after the property was acquired by the Baptists, it was utilized for entertainment purposes, as well as being a place of worship and in fact, was still referred to as Ker's Music Hall or the Music Hall.

On January 18th, 1871, a Shakespearian Literary Evening was presented in The Tabernacle by Professor Melville Bell, Alexander Graham Bell's father, under the auspices of the Mechanics Institute. An advertisement in The Brantford Expositor pointed out that Professor Bell had been the occupant of the Chair of Elocution at University College, London, England for many years and was now a resident of Brantford and that his presentation was an Expository Condensation of Shakespeare's entire tragedy of Hamlet with historical introduction as delivered to the Lowell Institute in Boston, Mass.

WICKLIFFE/WYCLIFFE HALL

Around the year 1874, the new Y.M.C.A. Building, located on the south side of Colborne Street in the general area of the Woolco Store became available for the presentation of live theatre, including Concerts, Recitals, Comic Operas and Dramatic presentations, and provided seating for 900 people. Construction of the building which commenced in 1860, took some fourteen years to complete. Wycliffe Hall was the cultural focal point for music lovers and those associated with the performing arts in Brantford for many years. Many of the early musical groups, such as the Brantford Philharmonic Society, the Brantford Mendelssohn Society and the Brantford Musical Society, organized, met, practiced and presented their talents in this facility.

On December 20th, 1876, a Literary Evening from the works of Shakespeare and British and American Authors was presented in Wycliffe Hall by Professor Alexander Melville Bell and Professor David

Charles Bell, father and uncle, respectively of Alexander Graham Bell.

Whitney Mockridge, a member of the Mockridge Family associated with Grace Church, gained an unquestionable reputation as Brantford's greatest gift to the music world, gaining international fame. As a boy he was an alto singer in St. Jude's Church, completing his vocal education in Toronto and subsequently going to Chicago where he was quickly acclaimed one of the tenors of the day. He afterwards sang in London with the Carl Rosa Grand Opera Company at Covent Gardens and also had the honour of a Royal Command appearance before Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace.

On the evening of May 11th 1894 in Wycliffe Hall, Whitney Mockridge gave his final Brantford recital before his departure to reside permanently in England. The ex-premier of the Province of Ontario, the Honourable A.S. Hardy, most musical himself and a warm supporter of high-class musicians, both here and in Toronto, was in attendance at the Recital. Mr. Mockridge was accompanied by Miss Lillian Houlding (later Mrs. Frank Leeming), Mrs. Whitney Mockridge and Mrs. P.D. Hart.

As previously noted, the Brantford Philharmonic Society, formed under the direction of Edward Kimpton in the 1870's, practised in Wycliffe Hall. The Kimpton Family was quite paramount in the musical life of Brantford in the late 1870's and early 1880's.

During the 1880's, the Brantford Mendelssohn Society was formed under the direction of C.A. Garratt, a member of another exceptionally gifted musical family. Mr. Garratt was Choirmaster at Grace Church and a director of Music at the Brantford Young Ladies College. The principal work of the Society for 1886 and 1887, entitled "The Grand Jubilee Concert", was presented in Wycliffe Hall on June 21st, 1887.

In 1893, Frederick G. Rogers came to Brantford as organist of Grace Church and Musical Director of the Young Ladies College. Mr. Rogers was destined to take a very prominent place in the musical life of Brantford and in fact, during his residence here, it is reported that Brantford attained to a musical pinnacle. Shortly after his arrival here, Mr. Rogers was instrumental in forming the Brantford Musical Society which presented diversified programs, ranging from oratorios to comic operas in both Wycliffe Hall and the Stratford Opera House.

Wycliffe Hall served as a public entertainment hall until the early 1900's when a new Y.M.C.A. facility was erected at Queen and Darling Streets. The cornerstone for the new building was laid in 1912. In later years, Wycliffe Hall was converted to a public dance hall.

During renovations in the Wycliffe Hall building in 1957, numerous playbills promoting various types of public entertainment were found adhered to brick walls which had been covered over years previous in a long forgotten third floor room. Unfortunately, the playbills could not be saved but they provided some insight into the type of shows enjoyed by Brantfordians well back into the 1870's.

The former Wycliffe Hall building was destroyed by fire on January 14th, 1961.

STRATFORD'S OPERA HOUSE

On February 25th, 1881, it was announced in The Brantford Expositor, that Messrs. John and Joseph Stratford had purchased the Tabernacle Building (formerly Ker's Music Hall) at 138-140 Colborne Street from the Baptists for the sum of \$10,000. The article went on to state that it was hoped that the new proprietors would make the necessary changes to provide a first class music hall.

The Tabernacle Building was subsequently renovated by Mr. Joseph Stratford. The former Ker's Music Hall then became known as Stratford's Opera House.

On March 4th, 1881, The Brantford Expositor stated as follows:

As the plans in reference to the proposed Opera House are incomplete, it would be premature to allude to them in detail, but of one thing our citizens may rest assured and that is Brantford will soon boast of a hall so complete as to fully meet the requirements of our rising city.

On October 21st, 1881, it was announced in The Brantford Expositor that Stratford's Opera House would be presenting a rare bill of attractions to the citizens of Brantford during the winter months and that some good companies had already fixed the dates of their coming.

On October 31st, 1881, the Stratford Opera House staged its initial performance to a full house and it was described as a perfect success in many ways. Before the curtain rose on the New York production of "Only a Farmer's Daughter", which had played to a full house in Detroit a few nights earlier, the Mayor of the City of Brantford, Dr. Reginald Henwood, made a few remarks complimenting Mr. Joseph Stratford on his efforts in creating the Opera House, which he described as a gem of architecture.

On November 4th, 1881, an article was published in The Brantford Expositor, describing in detail the Opera House, which Mr. Joseph Stratford, at immense financial outlay, had converted from a mere hall into one of the most elegant, best finished, most comfortable, safe Opera Houses in the Dominion, which it was emphasized, was in most instances excelled by few, even in the United States.

A portion of the article noted above, stated as follows:

There are a few conscientious people in our fair city who feel that any money expended in erecting a place of amusement is money worse than wasted but all agree that if one is to be built it is better to have it a credit to the city. As it has been in the past, travelling troupes of the lower order predominated, as the old Palmer's Hall was utterly unfit for the purposes for which it was devoted. Good companies came occasionally but the members were so disgusted that they refused to come again, and the result was that "nigger shows" and "blondes" got what they could, while the better class stood aloof.

Judging from the foregoing, it is of interest to note that a somewhat similar attitude prevailed in Brantford in 1881 regarding monies expended to provide a place of amusement and entertainment as currently exists regarding the restoration of the Capitol Theatre. Times really haven't changed much. The article is somewhat less than complimentary in its comments regarding Palmer's Hall as a place of entertainment, particularly when it is considered that it was the only facility of any consequence available for such purposes from 1855 until 1866 when Ker's Music Hall was established. Even with the competition from the Ker facility and later from Wycliffe Hall, it continued to function until 1881 when the Stratford Opera House likely caused its demise.

The front of the Stratford Opera House abutted on Colborne Street and was illuminated on "open nights" by calcium lights. The rear of the building was on Market Lane and was provided with a baggage room in the basement and another on a line with the stage and a hoist for lifting baggage, scenery, etc., to the dressing rooms and stage. The staircases were wide, one leading to the main

auditorium, manager's office and ladies' cloak room, the other to the balcony seats, general gallery, etc. The walls were adorned with Parian casts, busts, etc., and the ceiling and walls were elegantly decorated and frescoed. The auditorium was provided with 600 iron opera chairs, besides ordinary seats in the gallery. The scenery and drop curtains, which were very handsome and extravagant - the latter presenting a view of the Golden Horn and Constantinople. The dressing rooms were reached by a stairway at the rear of the main entrance and were comfortably finished. The water attachments and sprinklers, both on the stage and in the house for use in case of fire, were second to none for completeness and simplicity. The management of the Opera House was excellent, everything being done with military precision. The house police and attaches were all in regular uniform and everything was under the immediate management of the proprietor.

The Stratford Opera House boasted its own orchestra which was organized in 1882 under the conductorship of R.R. Wimperis and was acknowledged to be one of the best west of Toronto. It was comprised of the following: 1st Violin - Mr. Wimperis; 2nd Violin - W. West; Piano-forte - Mrs. Wimperis; Double Bass - Frank Schlompka; Flute - W. Edwards; Cornet - Mr. Gillespie; and Trombone - D. Callahan.

Brantfordians were very fond of light operas and prior to 1893 an Operatic Society was formed. For about fifteen years the Society produced a number of light operas, many of which were staged by Dr. F.C. Heath. Mr. W.N. Andrews and Mr. Albert A. Jordan also wielded the baton on occasion. The Stratford Opera House was always filled to capacity when the Society's productions were staged. The void left by the demise of the Operatic Society was soon filled by the Brantford Musical Society. The Operatic and Musical Societies staged the following well known light Operas, amongst others, in the Stratford Opera House and Wycliffe Hall: "Iolanthe", "Chimes of Normandy", "Pinafore", "Pirates of Penzance", "Princess Bonnie", "The Mountebanks", "Erminie", "Little Tycoons".

Brantford always seemed to have been well served with leading out of town attractions, particularly in the late 1880's and 1890's. This was quite the golden period of the city in regard to the bringing here of leading military bands, symphony orchestras and vocalists and instrumentalists of reknown and the citizens showed their appreciation of the enterprise of the promoters by attending the performances in the Opera House and the Drill Hall, literally by the thousands. A failure was never recorded, although some of the attractions brought here called for guarantees as high as \$2,000, a considerable amount in those days.

In 1906, Dr. Henri Kew Jordan founded the Schubert Choir by amalgamating the Brantford Male Chorus founded in 1901 and the Brant Avenue Methodist Church Choir. The new Choir was recognized internationally and presented great orchestras and noted artists during its own performances in the Stratford Opera House, Wycliffe Hall, The Grand Opera House and later in the Capitol Theatre.

The Stratford Opera House continued under the control of Mr. Stratford until 1902, when on account of other business interests he transferred the management to Frank C. Johnson. Associated with Mr. Johnson, were his three sons, Frank C. Johnson, Jr., Secretary/Treasurer, Walter Johnson, Musical Director and Harry Johnson. Mr. A.J. Wilkes became President of the Brant Opera House Company.

After flourishing for 27 years, the Stratford Opera House was destroyed by fire on January 1st, 1908. The Thespian Arts were then transferred to a building at Darling and West Streets which had formerly been a curling and skating rink which became known as the Grand Opera House.

During its existence, productions such as *Passion's Slave*, *The Galley Slave* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* graced the Opera House stage, along with Minstrel Shows, Gilbert and Sullivan favourites, light Operas and entertainment in every form. Winston Churchill was once an honoured guest and gave a brilliant address as did Oscar Wilde. Lillie Langtre, the beautiful and extremely talented British actress, was an immediate favourite with the Brantford patrons.

DUFFERIN RIFLES DRILL HALL

Construction of the Dufferin Rifles Drill Hall, which exists today as the Brantford Armouries, was commenced in 1891 and completed in 1893. For a number of years in the 1890's and early 1900's, performances by military bands, symphony orchestras, vocalists, instrumentalists and other musical groups were staged in this facility, usually commanding a full house.

In 1896, Frederick G. Rogers and the Brantford Musical Society presented the Oratorio "Samson" in the Drill Hall. Dr. Rogers by this time had gathered together a well trained chorus of some 250 voices. He was assisted during the recital by four leading soloists from New York, including Mr. George Fleming, formerly of Brantford and the Harris Orchestral Club of Hamilton. The

presentation was termed a monumental success.

In 1897, Dr. Rogers and the Society presented the Oratorio "The Messiah", in the Drill Hall, which was an artistic success. The Society went out of existence after this presentation and the city, as a result, was the poorer, artistically and musically.

VICTORIA HALL

Victoria Hall was built in 1877 as First Presbyterian Church on the present site of the Provincial Court Building at George and Wellington Streets. The building was acquired by the Y.W.C.A. in 1901 and was subsequently remodelled, acquiring the name Victoria Hall. It remained in use until 1958 at which time the building was demolished to make way for the City Hall/Provincial Court Complex. In 1957, the Y.M. - Y.W.C.A. merged and consolidated operations in the Y.M.C.A. Building at Queen and Darling Streets. During the early 1900's, Victoria Hall was utilized for entertainment purposes and operated in conjunction with the Wycliffe Hall facilities.

On March 3rd, 1904, a dissertation and a light opera were presented in Victoria Hall. Literature connected to the presentation indicated that it was to have been staged in Wycliffe Hall. The reference to Wycliffe Hall on the literature was crossed out and Victoria Hall inserted in its place.

THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE

On January 1st, 1908, City Police Constable Thomas Boylan, while on foot patrol, discovered smoke coming from the Stratford Opera House on Colborne Street at approximately 5:00 a.m. The Fire Department responded promptly to the alarm, being less than two blocks away at the corner of Queen and Dalhousie Streets, but the flames had gained such headway before being discovered that the building and its contents were a total loss.

Frank C. Johnson, who had taken over management of the Opera House from Joseph Stratford in 1902, acquired a former curling and skating rink on West Street at Darling Street and converted it to what became known as the Grand Opera House. As it was a big substantial building, it lent itself readily to the necessary remodeling to convert it into a theatre with a seating capacity for 1,400 people.

From all reports from citizens of Brantford who remember the Grand Opera House, it was functional but not fancy, as had its predecessor, the Stratford Opera House been.

Miss Melita Raymond was born in Brantford and is one hundred years of age, having celebrated her birthday on December 16th, 1886. Her father, William Gautress Raymond was a City Alderman from 1890 to 1895, Mayor in 1898-99, leaving this position to become Post Master and subsequently representing Brantford as a Member of Parliament from 1921 to 1925. Miss Raymond has a clear recollection of personally singing in concerts at the Grand Opera House on several occasions and also at the unveiling ceremony of the Bell Memorial on October 24th, 1917, at which time she had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Alexander Graham Bell. Miss Raymond studied music and trained as a singer in New York City. She also has memories of attending performances at the Grand Opera House.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold White both have memories of attending performances at the Grand Opera House. Mr. White has particular memories of concerts which were presented by the Salvation Army Band and Mrs. White, of the live presentation of Uncle Tom's Cabin. During the mid to late 1920's, Mr. White was a member of the Temple Theatre's Vaudeville Orchestra which was known as the "Capitolians", and which performed in conjunction with silent movie presentations.

Mrs. Ellen Vansickle, who is the widow of Harold Vansickle, the former director of the Temple Theatre's "Capitolians" Orchestra, has memories of the Grand Opera House. Her husband played the violin in the Grand at the age of fifteen. Mrs. Vansickle has memories of attending performances at the Opera House and has a particular recollection of an all ladies band which was a featured group. The ladies of the band were all attired in white and it is believed they were known as the Fadettes. She stated that it was unusual in those days to have a band entirely composed of ladies, particularly with the lugging of instruments and equipment that would have been involved. She has memories, as a child, of climbing the stairs to the Opera House gallery, which ran up one side of the building.

The Schubert Choir, under the direction of Dr. Henri Kew Jordan, entertained on a regular basis at the Grand Opera House. The Choir also performed and competed in many cities across North America, including Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener, Niagara Falls, New York, Buffalo and New York City and attracted a large following everywhere, upholding the finest Canadian choral traditions. On one occasion in 1911, the Sheffield Choir from England, under the direction of Dr. Coward, gave a recital at the Opera House.

Dr. Jordan and the Schubert Choir arose in the Opera House balcony and sang an original chorus of welcome, which greatly pleased the venerable English conductor.

In 1914, Frank Johnson gave up the management of the Opera House and was succeeded by James T. Whittaker, as lessee and manager. Mr. Whittaker, who had been a member of the staff of the Stratford Opera House and later, the Grand, was the last in a series of managers of these popular entertainment centres. His predecessors had been Joseph Stratford, William Killmaster, F. Rutledge, the Tuttle Brothers, the Abbott Brothers and Frank C. Johnson. Eventually he found the competition from the moving picture theatres too much for the Opera House, particularly after the opening of the Temple Theatre which played a major role in dealing the finishing blow in bringing about the demise of this facility for the presentation of live entertainment.

In 1917, the Brantford Oratorio Society was formed by Dr. W.J. Schofield, the organist at First Baptist Church. The Society's first performance was given in April of 1917 at the Grand Opera House. Dr. Schofield remained with the Choir until 1919 when he assumed a position in Flint, Michigan. Dr. F.C. Thomas, who was organist at Grace Church, then took the baton and led the Society until its demise around 1927. In 1920, Dr. Thomas became temporary organist at First Baptist Church and in 1924, organist at Park Baptist. In the ten or so years of its existence, the Choir presented fifteen major productions including Mendelssohn's 'Hymn of Praise', Handel's 'Messiah', the 'Elijah', the 'Creation' and Bizet's 'Carmen', with the Brantford Symphony Orchestra, formed in 1919 and also under the direction of Dr. Thomas, providing the accompaniment. The symphony was temporarily discontinued in the early 1930's when Dr. Thomas moved to England.

The Grand Opera House during its heyday, provided enjoyable entertainment for all ages. A great many of its stage shows were designed especially for kids but some of them had sentimental appeal for adults. Shows such as Uncle Tom's Cabin and Jiggs and Maggie were shown almost on an annual basis.

The Grand had both a balcony and an upper balcony which had great appeal to children since they were so high up they could almost reach up and touch the roof.

Minstrel shows were perennial attractions at the Grand and the visiting troupes would put on a parade through the downtown area before the performance. The Grand was particularly popular with

such shows as this because it was one of the few theatres in Canada where the stage properties could be driven on horse drawn drays, directly from the street to the stage. Some of the most elaborate stage productions were also brought in and presented at the Grand. One of these was the road company of Ben Hur, one of the biggest and most popular of road shows, which only three theatres in Ontario, including the Grand, could handle. The other two were a theatre in Hamilton and the Royal Alex in Toronto.

Shows such as the Katzenjammer Kids, Mutt and Jeff, Charlie's Aunt, Peg O' My Heart, Ten Nights in a Bar Room and the Dumbells played the Grand on a regular basis.

In addition to stage shows, the Opera House varied its offering by showing at times, some famous early motion pictures, including, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, Heart of the Sea with Dorothy and Lillian Gish, The Three Musketeers, The Whip, King Neptune's Daughter with Annette Killerman, Orphans of the Storm and D. W. Griffith's epoch making film, The Birth of a Nation.

Mr. Whittaker brought to Brantford some of the "greats" of the entertainment world in their day - Sir John Martin-Harvey, Ethel and Lionel Barrymore, Walter Hampden, Robert B. Mantill, Sir Cyril Maude, Pat Rooney, May Robson, Herbert Marshall and Sir Harry Lauder. There were also outstanding musical artists, among them, Francis Butt, Dame Clara Butt, Mischa Elman and Mark Hambourg.

Blackstone, the famed magician, appeared several times at the Grand Opera House and on one occasion, was lowered into the Grand River from the old Iron Bridge in a secured packing case from which he readily escaped.

Mr. Whittaker often told a story of a bright-eyed, dark haired boy about nine years old who once sat in his office eating peanuts. The time was during the First World War and the boy was a little fellow named Tyrone Power, who was destined to become a celebrated motion picture star. The boy's father, Tyrone Power Sr., was starring in the lead role of "The Servant in the House", which was playing at the Opera House. It is of interest to note that Tyrone Power in later years, played the leading role in the film version of "The Black Rose", based on a novel by Brantford Author, Thomas B. Costain.

Unfortunately, live entertainment lost its popularity with the advent of silent movies and the Opera House era lost its viability

with the introduction of talkies in 1929 and as a result the Grand closed around 1930, thereby bringing about the demise of strictly live theatre as known to Brantford residents for in excess of one hundred years.

On June 20th, 1931, Brantford City Council, at a special meeting, authorized the purchase of the vacant Grand Opera House for the sum of \$5,000. This acquisition was not done with the intention of the City of Brantford going into the field of entertainment as was the situation when Council announced the purchase of the Capitol Theatre in 1985. It was done merely to acquire a piece of property at a bargain price because the site was being considered as a logical part of a long range community planning project. The Town Planning Commission hoped that eventually all the properties between the newly completed War Memorial at Dalhousie Street and Brant Avenue and the Bell Memorial at West and Wellington Streets could be acquired by the City, to be beautified and developed as a community show place close to the centre of the City. The possibility of erecting a new city hall and a civic centre within the area was one of the aspects of the planning. Whether or not the visionary project had to be abandoned because of the depression of the 1930's, nothing ever came of it.

The old Opera House apparently remained vacant for approximately five years. Many of the seats were sold to Agnew Surpass Shoe Stores Limited and were placed in stores throughout Canada. The scenery was sold to amateur dramatic companies. Eventually the City demolished the building and some of the materials were used to build the City Works Barns at Colborne Street West and Gilkinson Street, the present site of Lorne Towers Senior Citizens Residence. The former site of the Opera House is now occupied by the Salvation Army Citadel.

After the disappearance of the Opera House, James Whittaker maintained his active interest in providing entertainment for the public and in 1933, he organized the Brantford Community Concert Course. This personal enterprise not only billed talented Brantford soloists, but also brought to the City noted celebrities. Under these auspices came such notables as Edward Johnson of Metropolitan Opera fame, Anna Case, Lawrence Tibbitt, Reginald Stewart and many others.

It was also Mr. Whittaker who introduced to Brantford the Eaton Operatic Society of Toronto which presented shows here for a long period under the auspices of the Kiwanis Club of Brantford.

SILENT MOVIES AND VAUDEVILLE

Brantford was introduced to the silent movie screen in November of 1906 when Mr. B. Allan and his sons Jule and Jay, opened "The Theatorium" on the south side of Colborne Street almost opposite King Street. The opera house stage shows were popular, but it was the advent of the movies that revolutionized public entertainment. In those early days of the movies, the vast majority of those who opened movie houses did so with the idea of making a quick buck on something they considered an overnight phenomenon. Very few people, including those who went into the business, appeared to sense the potential growth and permanency of the new form of public entertainment. The Allans, however, had more confidence and broader views and subsequent developments justified their faith in the future of movies.

The Allan's plans suffered somewhat of a setback in 1908 when an explosion of natural gas destroyed "The Theatorium". Undaunted, they lost little time in opening another movie house, "Wonderland" at 21 George Street, opposite the old Market Square in 1909. This venture remained in operation for only about a year. "Wonderland" was located where the Eaton Store is presently situated. Their next effort was "The Gem" Theatre, which was located on the south side of Colborne Street opposite Queen Street and was destroyed by fire on March 4th, 1915.

The Allans later sold their movie interests here and transferred their business involvement to film distribution. Deciding that western Canada appeared to be a good field for movie theatres, they relocated in Calgary and soon established a chain of theatres. They subsequently returned to the east and established their headquarters in Toronto, continually acquiring theatres for their chain and extending their operation into the United States.

In December 1908, Mr. Ernest Moule came to Brantford from London and became active on the movie scene, opening "The Lyric" Theatre at 156 Colborne Street which would have been on the north side of the street. This enterprise remained in operation until 1911.

In 1910, Mr. Moule opened "The Apollo" Theatre next to the Belmont Hotel which was located on the south side of Colborne Street, west of Market Street, the current site of Massey House. Music played a minor part in "The Apollo", with Mrs. Moule playing the piano and Mr. Moule singing solos between reel changes and during the frequent break downs. "The Apollo" remained in operation until 1919.

In the early theatres, films were accompanied by a pianist who tried valiantly to supply the best sound effects possible on the piano and to adapt the music to the tempo of the scenes depicted. A trap drummer would sometimes be added to provide more realistic effects. As the movies became more popular and the quality improved, a violinist was added and eventually an orchestra of five or more members provided the background music.

In 1913, "The Brant" Theatre was established on the south side of Dalhousie Street opposite the Capitol Theatre. "The Brant" had the distinction of being the first theatre in Brantford to employ a professional orchestra comprised of three or four professional musicians from New York, with the rest of the eight or ten piece orchestra being local talent. Although "The Brant" was mainly a vaudeville house and movie theatre, it also hosted many stage shows and one group, The Jane Hastings Players was so popular, they were booked for an entire season. When "The Brant" was opened, Mr. Moule took over its management and a year later he assumed full control.

A remarkable performance was staged in "The Brant" Theatre by the Canadian Choir in February of 1934. The Choir, normally consisting of sixty members, was augmented to one hundred voices for the occasion and accompanied by the seventy-five member Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra. It performed an original composition of the Choir's founder, Mr. Frederic Lord, entitled, "The Ninetieth Psalm".

In 1951, "The Brant" was renamed "The Paramount". In 1960, "The Paramount" ceased to function as a movie theatre, falling victim to the increased popularity of television. Early in 1962, "The Paramount", was heavily damaged as a result of a devastating fire in the nearby Brant Hotel, and as a result was subsequently demolished along with the Hotel, becoming a parking lot.

An open-air theatre, "The Colonial", was started in 1910 on the west side of King Street at number 14. After one season of operation it was roofed in. In 1917, Mr. Moule purchased "The Colonial", made structural changes and renamed it "The Rex". "The Rex" Theatre seated 800 people and presented live entertainment as well as silent movies. Every seat was filled when Mr. Moule, as his first presentation, featured Mack Sennett's Bathing Beauties. Some of the most popular shows brought to "The Rex" were Zane Grey's western thrillers, starring the most famous of the early movie cowboys, Tom Mix and his horse Tony.

Vaudeville acts were always an important part of the show in the

silent movie era, but they soon disappeared after the development of the talkies.

THE TEMPLE/CAPITOL THEATRE

By the mid to late teens of this Century, the City of Brantford had grown to become a significant amusement centre resulting from its accessibility to residents of the County and surrounding area by radial lines (electric railway) and automobiles. As a result, a scheme was developed in 1919 for a much larger silent movie and vaudeville house than had previously existed. A Company known as Brant Amusements Limited was subsequently formed, composed of the following: Roy Secord, President; Claude Secord, Vice President; Ernest Moule, Secretary/Treasurer and Managing Director; P.H. Secord; W.T. Henderson. Resulting therefrom, the Temple Theatre, which we know today as the Capitol, was erected.

The Temple Theatre, designed by Thomas White Lamb of New York, was erected at a cost of \$350,000 by P.H. Secord and Sons, Contractors, and was promoted as being elaborately designed, splendidly conceived and artistically perfect. It boasted automatic cooling in the summer and kept heat at a perfectly comfortable degree in the winter, assuring comfort with the latest and best in attractions. The stage was 94 feet by 30 feet, four feet narrower than the stage of the Royal Alexander in Toronto and was capable of handling the biggest shows on the road. The Temple was rated the finest theatre in any City in Canada up to twice the size of Brantford. It had a seating capacity for 1,600, of which 950 were in the front body and 650 in the balcony. Twelve dressing rooms, comfortably fitted and capable of handling the largest theatrical company were provided. Over one hundred pieces of scenery were on hand, kept fresh, replaced when worn and always in splendid working order. The new theatre was managed by Ernie Moule.

The Temple Theatre was officially opened on December 22nd, 1919, with performances at 2:15 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. daily. Admission for the Matinee Performance was 25¢, with the Boxes and Loges going at 50¢ and for the Evening Performance, 25¢, 35¢ and 50¢ and 75¢ for the Boxes and Loges.

In 1920, the Temple Theatre became one of the first to join the Famous Players Corporation chain of theatres.

An essential part of every show presented in the Temple was the theatre orchestra which was known as "The Capitolians". Most of

the vaudeville acts depended on the orchestra to help them put their acts across effectively. In the former dressing room under the stage which was used by members of the Orchestra, on the doors leading to the Orchestra Pit, were old and yellowed pictures of known stars who are just ghosts of the theatre's illustrious past, many of which have been removed. The former Orchestra Pit, which was covered over around 1930, has been recently uncovered and restored to its original elegance, including a brass railing.

In 1925, the late Mr. Harold Vansickle was appointed as the director of music at the Temple Theatre. Mr. Vansickle started his musical career at an early age and when only fifteen, he played the violin at the Grand Opera House. He later played violin, drums and piano at "The Rex" Theatre on King Street. He was one of the original members of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. The composition of the Temple Theatre Orchestra, "The Capitolians", was as follows: Violin - Harold Vansickle; Piano - Adeline Moule; Cornet - George Renwick; Trombone - Dave Mitson; Clarinet - Cesto Sinibaldi; Saxophone - John Venables; Bass Viol - James Darwen; Drums/Tympani - Harold White; Saxophone - H. Persall; Supply Pianist - Ronald Ramsbottom. Mr. Harold White, the Orchestra Drummer, is the sole surviving member of "The Capitolians" and resides here in Brantford.

On May 23rd, 1929, the first talkie movie was presented in the Temple Theatre. The feature picture was Interference and featured Clive Brook, William Powell, Evelyn Brent and Doris Kenyon. The complete program included other attractions, one of which was That Party in Person, featuring Eddie Cantor and Ruth Etting. Up until this time the movie stars had only been shadows flitting over a silver screen with printed words flashed on the screen to provide the conversation as well as any other background information that might be necessary. The talkies permitted the synchronizing of sound and pictures using what was known as the film and disc methods, by means of which the screen became human.

The newly installed equipment, acquired at a cost of \$30,000 and weighing some three tons, was described as being the most modern and advanced that could be found in any city on the continent. However, it turned out that there still were a few bugs to be ironed out as there was some sort of difficulty in perfecting the synchronization of sound and picture but the movie goers who filled the theatre that night thoroughly enjoyed this wonderful innovation and were not inclined to quibble about a little thing like that.

On June 10th, 1929, Broadway Melody, heralded as the greatest of

all the sound pictures up to that time and the first musical shown in Brantford, was presented at the Temple.

When the talkies started, it was announced that the Temple Theatre would continue to have an orchestra for a time. However, everyone knew that the bubble had burst and the "Capitolians" were disbanded in August of 1929 when their contract expired. Finished along with the day of the theatre orchestra, was the era of vaudeville. All through the 1920's, the Vaudeville attraction that supplemented the silent film entertainment had been a popular part of the show at the Temple. Mr. Harold White, the orchestra drummer, advises that once talkie movies were introduced, the "Capitolians" only played as an introduction to the feature film being presented and only until their contract expired, at which time they disbanded. He stated that many musicians and Vaudeville Acts found themselves out of work. Mr. White advised that he played in an orchestra at the Brant Theatre for about a month after he left the "Capitolians". He then commenced a teaching career at the Brantford Collegiate and was director of the school orchestra for over seven years.

In 1931, with the transition to talkies now in the past, the name of the Theatre was changed from the Temple to the Capitol. In 1932 Technicolour movies were introduced at the Capitol.

Over the years, the stage of the old Temple and Capitol Theatre has seen many of the old time greats of stage and screen and many famous shows have performed thereon, including Jack Benny, Guy Lombardo, Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians, Gracie Fields, Fred Allen, Sir Harry Lauder, George Robby and George Formby, to name a few and many of the top Vaudeville Acts and Stage Shows, such as Blossom Time, The Student Prince, No No Nanette, Hit the Deck, The Vagabond King and Abie's Irish Rose.

Captain Plunkett and His Dumbells were regular visitors for, usually three day stands and played to capacity audiences, as did the annual Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Operas under Kiwanis Club auspices. There were minstrel shows and visits by the National Ballet of Canada, performed with full orchestra, augmented by some local musicians, and the Eaton Operatic Society annual productions, light operas and in more recent times, groups such as the Canadian Brass.

The Temple and Capitol Theatre, over the years, has hosted performances by various local musical groups, including the Great War Veteran's Band, the Schubert Choir, the Canadian Choir, the Cock-

shutt Male Choir, the Brantford Ladies Choir, the Universal Cooler Mixed Choir, which functioned for many years under several different names, the Brantford Boys' Band, the Brantford Memorial Concert Band, the Brantford Symphony Orchestra, the Brant Men of Song, the Brantford Belle 'A' Dears, amongst others, as well as amateur dramatic presentations.

THE GREAT WAR VETERAN'S BAND was formed after the First World War by Bandsmen who had returned from service. The Band staged Sunday Evening Concerts in the Temple Theatre in the wintertime. This group eventually evolved into the Branch 90 Royal Canadian Legion Band.

THE SCHUBERT CHOIR, having been founded in 1906 by Henri Kew Jordan, consistently presented high quality choral singing during its performances, as well as having brought top name artists and orchestras to Brantford, including the Pittsburg Orchestra under the direction of Victor Herbert and later Emil Paur, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Orchestral Club and the Little Symphony.

Dr. Jordan conducted the Choir throughout its thirty-five years of existence, except for the years of World War One when he served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. During his absence, the Choir was directed by Mr. Clifford Higgins. Dr. Jordan was honoured by being awarded an honorary doctorate of music from the University of Toronto.

The Schubert Choir's annual concerts were performed at the Capitol Theatre after the closure of the Grand Opera House around 1930 and it also continued to perform in many cities across the continent, including at the World's Fair in New York in 1939. Its final Concert was held in the Capitol Theatre on April 23rd, 1941 at which time, Dr. Jordan retired. During its existence, the Schubert Choir won great acclaim, not only for itself and its members, but for the City of Brantford.

THE CANADIAN CHOIR, originally the Baptist Choral Union with headquarters at First Baptist Church, where its founder, Mr. Frederic Lord was organist, was established in 1929. Mr. Lord was also Director of Music at the Ontario School for the Blind. In 1930, the Choir undertook a tour of Britain, appearing in Edinburgh, Blackpool and at Royal Albert Hall in London, where it performed for the Royal Family. The King was impressed with the group's singing, so much so that they were invited to perform for the Royal Family at Buckingham Palace.

In the late 1930's, the Canadian Choir was reorganized into a smaller unit, reducing it from approximately sixty to around thirty voices. The Choir continued to give concerts locally and throughout Ontario and the Northern United States. Plans were made for a second tour of Great Britain and Europe but had to be abandoned due to the outbreak of World War Two. During the War and as a direct result therefrom, the Canadian Choir disbanded through lack of membership. The Choir made an invaluable contribution to the enhancement of Brantford's reputation as a choral city.

THE COCKSHUTT MALE CHOIR was founded in 1934 by Frank Holton and was one of the finest large male choruses to be found anywhere. Rehearsals were held after the five o'clock whistle had blown at the Cockshutt Plow Company on Mohawk Street. The Choir was also conducted by George Smale, Lansing MacDowell and Aleck Doherty.

In its early years, the Cockshutt Choir had annual concerts at the Capitol Theatre, featuring reknowned soloists such as Lois Marshall (Soprano), Gizelle MacKenzie (Violinist), Katherine Stokes (Pianist), Jean Dickerson (Soprano), Vivien Della Chiezza (Soprano), Thomas S. Thomas (Baritone) and Howard Cable's Orchestra.

In addition to the large annual concerts, the Choir performed numerous smaller concerts with talented local soloists, including Rose Ullias (Violinist), Helen Callaghan (Soprano), John Moses (Violinist) and Robert Rennie (Baritone).

The Choir gave concerts for Victory Bond Drives in Western Ontario and also attended "Big Sings" throughout the Province and the United States. In ten years, the Cockshutt Choir won seventeen first awards in major festivals throughout Canada. The Choir disbanded in 1959.

THE BRANTFORD LADIES CHOIR was founded in 1936 under the direction of Frank Holton and was primarily a competitive choir, winning twenty-one first place prizes at prominent Canadian and American Music Festivals between 1938 and 1954.

In 1945, the Universal Cooler Company began to sponsor the Brantford Ladies Choir. In later years, the Ladies Choir combined with the Cockshutt Male Choir and became THE UNIVERSAL COOLER MIXED CHOIR. Within a few years the choir became THE HENRI K. JORDAN MIXED CHOIR and a year later, THE CKPC MIXED CHOIR. The Choir disbanded in 1958 as THE FRANK HOLTON MIXED CHOIR.

THE BRANTFORD BOYS' BAND was formed in September of 1931 by E.M. Beadle and A. Watts with 48 members. Rehearsals were initially held in the Brantford Conservatory of Music which originally had been the home of John H. Stratford (now the Hill & Robinson Funeral Home). The first bandmaster was W.E. Clancy.

Out of the Brantford Boys' Band grew the Brantford School of Instrumental Music which was incorporated on September 10th, 1947 as the Brantford Boys' Band Association.

After the Second World War ended in 1945 and most of the former members of the Boys' Band returned home, a senior unit was formed as THE BRANTFORD MEMORIAL CONCERT BAND which continues to function today as a community band. The Band is composed of students, teachers, church organists, businessmen and others, constituting a real cross section of city and country.

The Brantford Memorial Concert Band presents concerts at the Capitol Theatre four times a year which are billed as the "Sunday Serenade". During these concerts, guest artists are invited to perform with the Band. The Band is currently conducted by Brian Beard, assisted by Ken Black, having succeeded Wilfred Manning in 1984. Mr. Manning had held the position for twenty years, having replaced Claude Keast.

THE BRANTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA was originally formed in 1919 by Dr. F.C. Thomas, and temporarily discontinued in the early 1930's when Dr. Thomas moved to England. In 1948 the Orchestra was reorganized under the direction of Frederick R. Godden, who was organist at Wesley United Church and Director of Music at the Brantford Collegiate. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Godden returned to England and the Orchestra continued to give concerts under the guidance of Harold Vansickle. On December 16th, 1951, the Universal Cooler Mixed Choir under the direction of Frank Holton and the Symphony, combined to present "The Messiah" in the Capitol Theatre. Because of business commitments, Mr. Vansickle was unable to continue as conductor of the Symphony, so once again it ceased to function

The Brantford Symphony Orchestra, as we know it today, had its beginnings in 1952 when the Brantford String Symphony was organized, conducted by Harold Neal from Toronto. Mr. Neal was replaced by John Gilbert and early in 1954, brass, woodwind and percussion sections were added and the Brantford Symphony Orchestra was reincarnated. A highly successful concert was given on May 9th, 1954. John Gilbert resigned in 1956 and was replaced by Claude W. Keast

who held the position until his death in 1968. Walter Babiak then took over as director, remaining until 1974 when Dr. Stanley Saunders took control.

The Brantford Symphony Orchestra has established itself among the foremost provincial and national ensembles and has attracted national and international artists. The Symphony continues to stage its popular concerts in its home - the Capitol Theatre.

In 1961, a number of enthusiastic male singers, some of whom had been members of the Cockshutt Male Choir, formed a choral group known as THE BRANT MEN OF SONG, under the direction of Frank Holton. At that time James Schofield was appointed conductor. In 1975, Mr. Schofield was succeeded by Gary Woodward, who continues in that position.

A ladies choral group, THE BRANTFORD BELLE 'A' DEARS, was organized in March of 1971, under the direction of Gary Woodward.

The Brant Men of Song and the Belle 'A' Dears perform as separate choirs and as a mixed chorus. Their performances at the Capitol Theatre have usually been in conjunction with the Brantford Memorial Concert Band, as guest artists.

Various amateur dramatic presentations have been staged in the Capitol Theatre. One in particular, was part of Brantford's Centennial Celebrations in 1977. It was a production by the late Arthur J. Kelly, entitled, "Stand Up and Shout about It", a musical which he wrote in Boxtel, Holland during the Second World War. Mr. Kelly rewrote, produced and directed the musical with help from choreographer, Mrs. B. English and music director, Mr. Fred Nicholas. The music covered time periods from Confederation to the present with emphasis on the two World Wars, as both presentations of the play celebrated War anniversaries. The play was performed originally in the Capitol Theatre on November 11th and 12th, 1970, commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the end of World War Two. On November 13th, 1977, it was presented in the Brantford and District Civic Centre and honoured the Brantford Centennial, the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Vimy.

In the late 1970's, the future of the Capitol Theatre appeared to be in question, with suggestions being made that it may be abandoned to the wrecker's hammer.

The late Arthur J. Kelly, in an effort to put Brantford on the map musically by bringing an artist of international reknown to the City to perform and to try and save the Capitol Theatre, embarked on a venture which made him infamous. His plan was to bring Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops Orchestra to Brantford on August 3rd, 1978 to have them play a Concert on Kerby Island, located in the Grand River above the Lorne Bridge. By virtue of the sheer novelty of his idea, Mr. Kelly did what few people ever did - lure Arthur Fiedler out of Boston. He met considerable opposition, but managed to set up "the last great concert Arthur Fiedler ever performed". Even though the Concert was not a success, it will be remembered as a musical event of considerable significance.

Fortunately, any plans which may have existed that would have placed the Capitol Theatre in jeopardy, never came to pass.

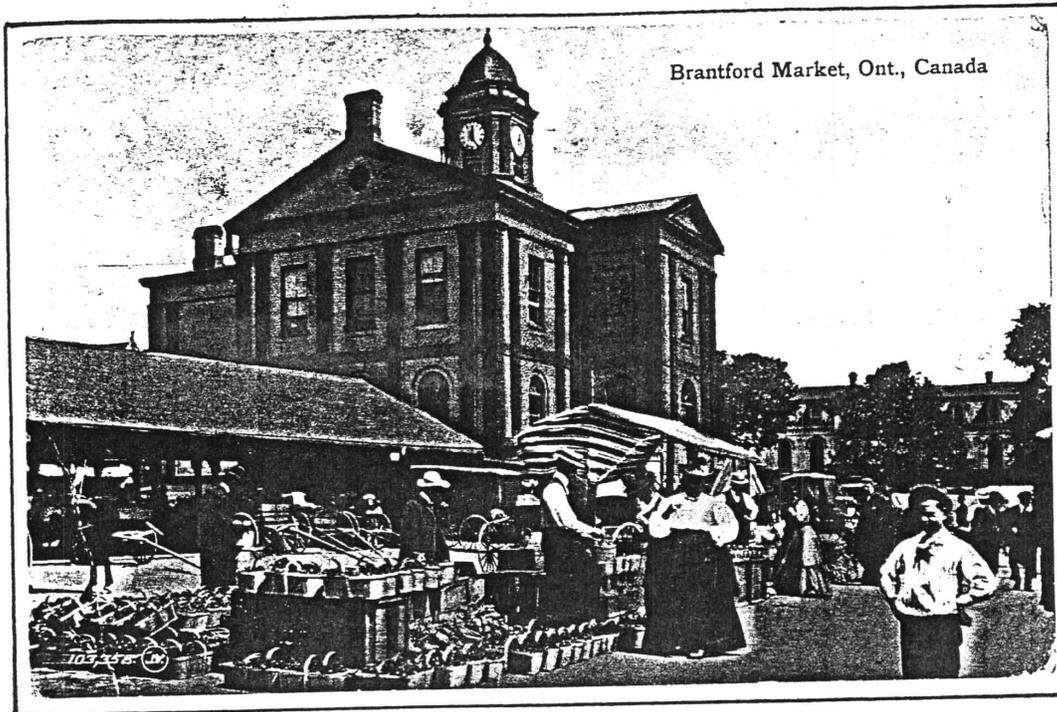
As a result of the redevelopment of downtown Brantford, Famous Players Limited, made the decision to relocate it's facilities in the new Eaton Market Square Complex. Subsequently, on October 7th, 1985, it was announced that Brantford City Council had approved the purchase of the Capitol Theatre for the sum of \$450,000. The Capitol closed its doors as a movie theatre on August 21st, 1986.

The rebirth of the Capitol Theatre on October 2nd, 1986, with the presentation of the Musical "Evita", which played to a full house, gave the cultural life of Brantford a tremendous boost. For many years, local residents have had to travel to Toronto's O'Keefe Centre or to Hamilton Place in order to enjoy 'a good show'. Now with the Capitol's conversion to a long awaited arts and entertainment centre, a variety of lively and enjoyable entertainment is being made available at our door step and at an affordable price.

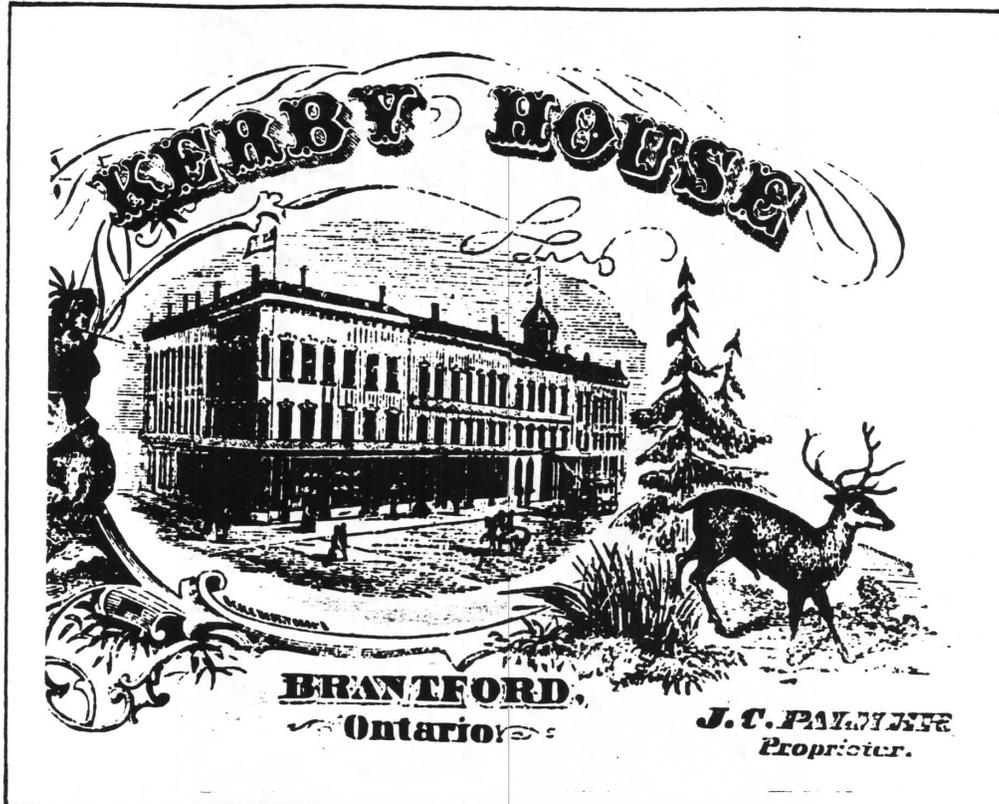
Since opening night, the Capitol Theatre has hosted Frank Gorshin and Imogene Coca in the Broadway Musical, "On the Twentieth Century", the Vancouver Chamber Choir, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, the Chicago City Ballet, the Peking Acrobats, Tanya Tucker and the Fats Waller Musical Show, "Ain't Misbehavin", to name a few of the enjoyable productions.

Brantford is and always has been a music loving city. From the late 1820's until around 1930, it had a resplendent history as a culturally significant community, boasting opera house facilities for nearly seventy-five of those one hundred, plus years. Much of the magic of live entertainment presented in days gone by, will be relived in a rejuvenated Capitol Theatre, which one day will hope-

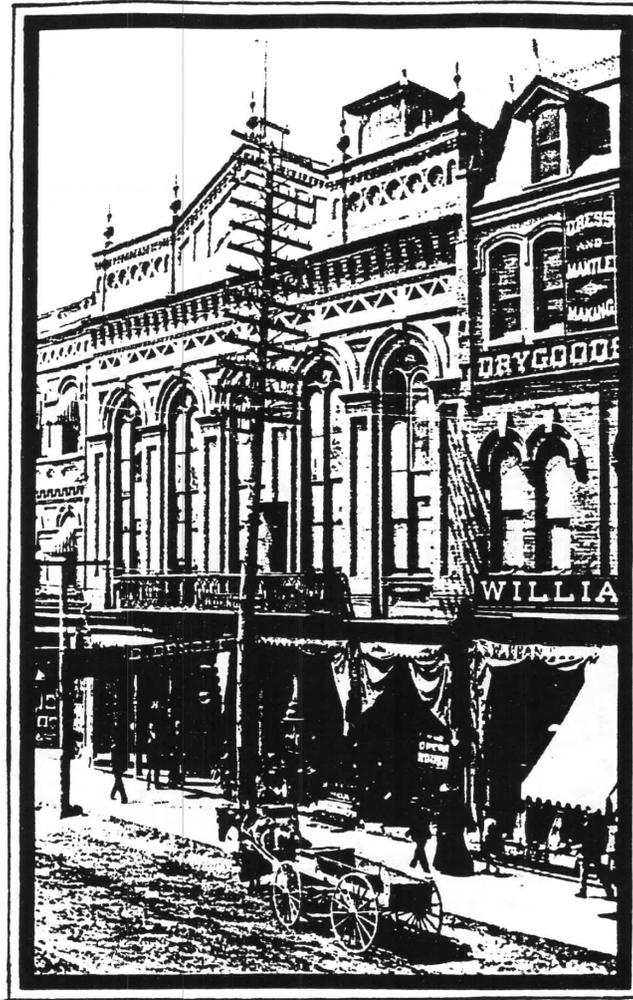
fully be returned to it's original grandeur, including the unforgettable ceiling murals. Brantfordians, after an interlude of over half a century, are once again able to share in the special excitement that comes from seeing live entertainers perform, all in their own home town.



Brantford City Hall as it appeared around 1911. It was built in 1849 and in 1850 became Brantford's first community amusement centre and remained as such for five years. It remained in use as Brantford's City Hall until December of 1964 when it was vacated and subsequently demolished the following year. The site of the former City Hall is now occupied by the Eaton Market Square Complex.



The Kerby House, as it appeared in the 1870's when it was operated by J.C. Palmer. Construction of the Hotel was commenced in 1852 by James Kerby and it opened for business as a hotel in 1854. In 1855, a rear hall was licenced as a place of entertainment, operating as the Kerby House Hall. In 1872, Mr. Palmer became the proprietor, changing the name of the hall to Palmer's Hall. In Brantford's early days the hall was known as Brantford's "Opera House". It continued to operate until 1881 when Stratford's Opera House opened. In 1976, the Kerby House was destroyed by fire.

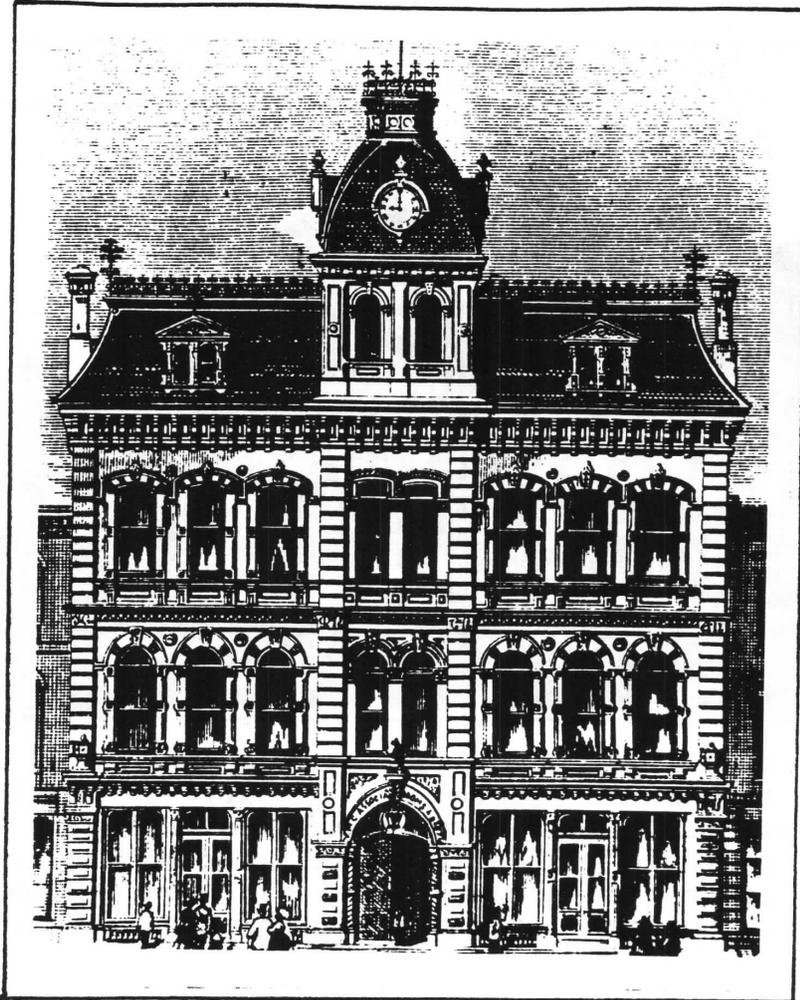


STRATFORD'S OPERA HOUSE

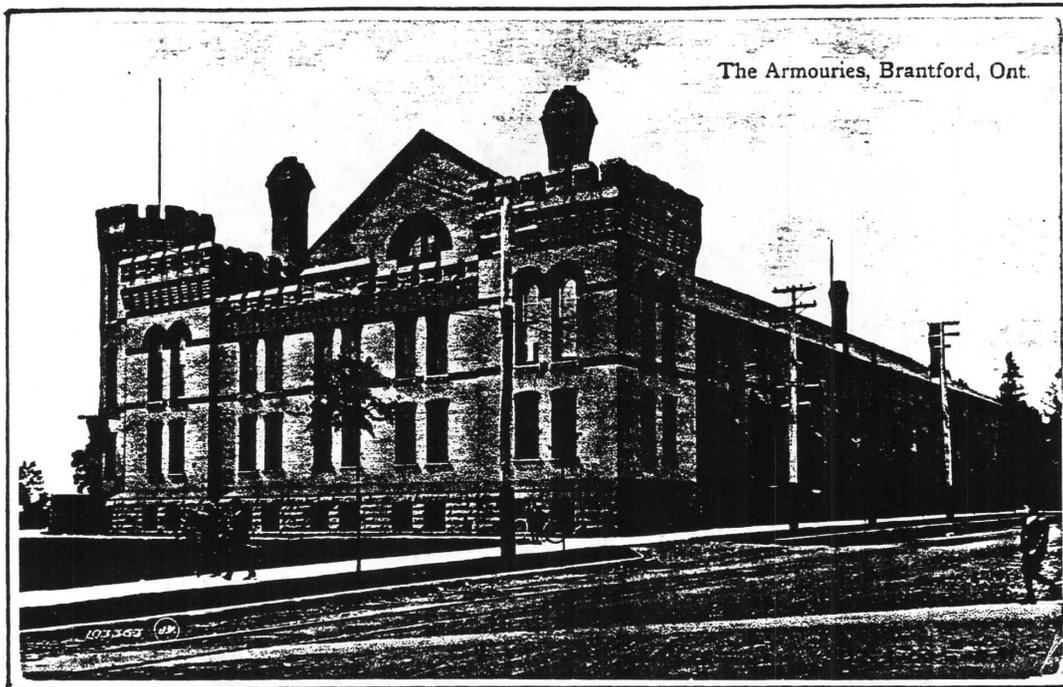
Originally erected in 1866 at 138-140 Colborne Street, on the north side mid-way between Queen and Market Streets as "Ker's Music Hall.

In 1868, building was purchased by the Baptists of the town and became known as the "Tabernacle". The facility was utilized for entertainment purposes as well as a place of worship until 1871. The "Tabernacle" saw the formation of Second Baptist Church which was to become Park Baptist Church.

In 1881, the "Tabernacle" was purchased by John and Joseph Stratford, becoming known as Stratford's Opera House. The building was destroyed by fire on January 1, 1908.



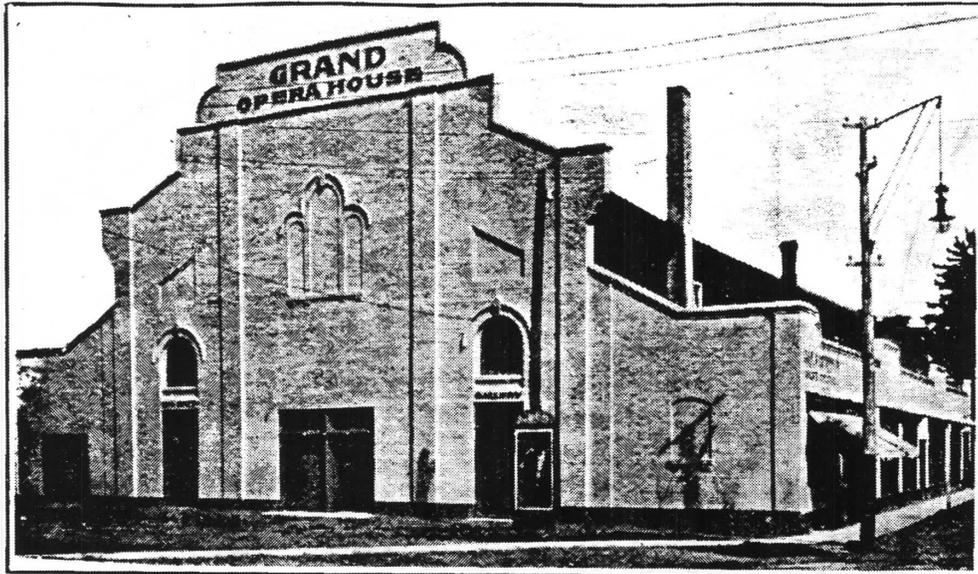
Wycliffe Hall, originally known as Wickcliffe Hall and located on the south side of Colborne Street, east of Market Street, in the general area of the Woolco Store, was Brantford's earliest YMCA Building. Construction of the building was commenced in 1860 and completed some 14 years later. It was the focal point for music lovers and those associated with the performing arts from around 1874 until the early 1900's. The former Wycliffe Hall was destroyed by fire on January 14th, 1961.



The Brantford Armouries as it appeared in the early 1900's. It was constructed as the Dufferin Rifles Drill Hall, commencing in 1891 and completed in 1893. For a number of years in the 1890's and early 1900's, it was the site of performances by military bands, symphony orchestras, vocalists, instrumentalists and other musical groups.

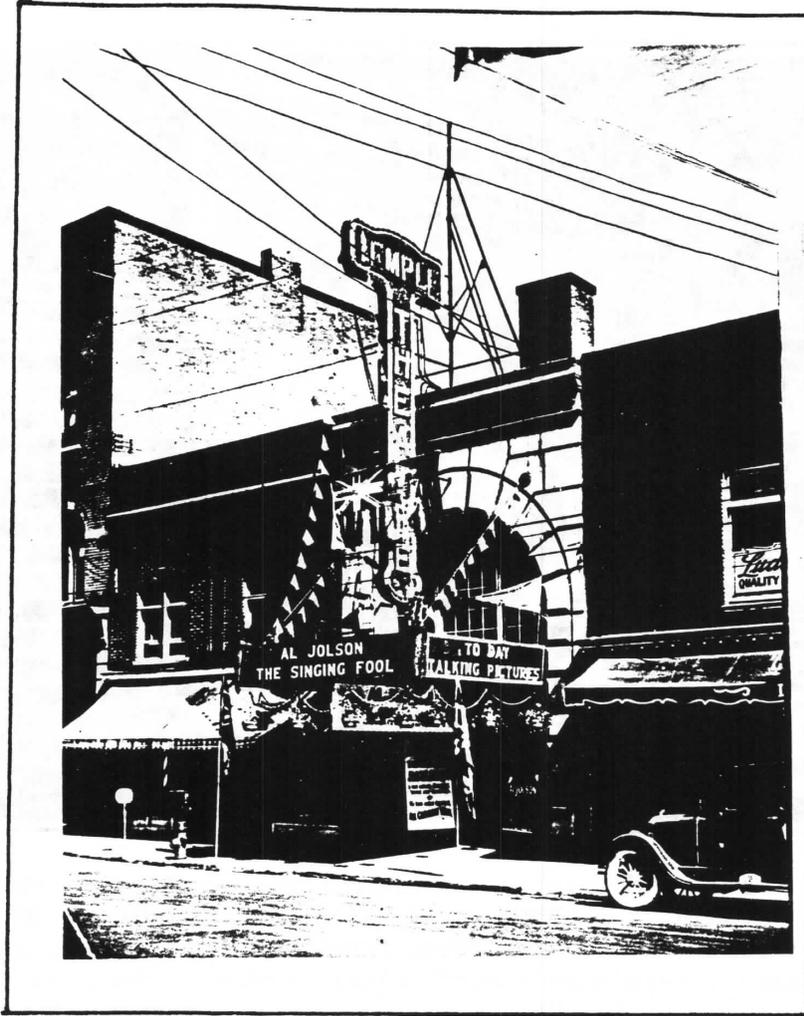


Victoria Hall, built in 1877 as First Presbyterian Church on the present site of the Provincial Court Building at George and Wellington Streets was acquired by the YWCA in 1901 and renamed Victoria Hall. During the early 1900's, it was utilized for entertainment purposes in conjunction with Wycliffe Hall. It remained in use until 1958 at which time it was demolished to make way for the City Hall/Provincial Court Complex.



The Grand Opera House was a landmark from 1908 until it was torn down in the early 1930s. It faced West Street, and on the Darling Street side of the building were half a dozen small business places.

Prior to being converted to an Opera House, building housed a curling and skating rink. It is now the site of the Salvation Army Citadel.



The Temple Theatre which opened on December 22nd, 1919 as a vaudeville and silent movie house. In 1929, talkie movies were introduced and in 1931 the name was changed to the Capitol Theatre.



Playbills found during renovations of former Wycliffe Hall building in 1957. They were discovered adhered to brick walls which had been covered over years previous in a long forgotten third floor room. They provided some insight into the type of shows enjoyed by Brantfordians well back into the 1870's.