

# Museum Corner: A Page From History

## July 2018- Looking Back: Ashcroft's Opera House and Community Hall

### Opera House/Town Hall

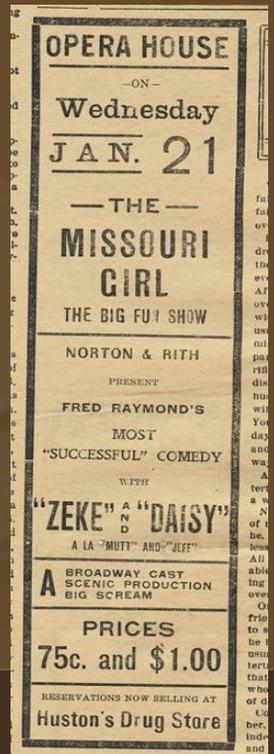
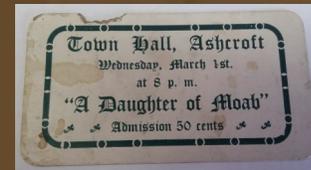
In March 1886, a plan to construct a Town Hall was put forth for the purpose of holding Devine service, public meetings, and concerts during the winter months.

Just over three years later, in December 1889, the Town Hall was erected with a cost of \$1500. The Hall was constructed by a group of Ashcroft citizens organized into a Town Hall Building Company. The land that the Town Hall was situated on was donated by J.C Barnes.

The Town Hall was described as a neat and inviting structure, tastily finished and was a standing monument of the liberality and progressiveness of the people of the town.

The building was to be used for all purposes, such as for local dances, annual balls, concerts, travelling troupe shows, skits and political debates! It was very rare that no form of amusement/entertainment, or recreation was happening at the Hall.

In the latter half of the 1890s, the Town Hall was then named the "Ashcroft Opera House" to fit its distinguished performers. Many notable guests performed here, including Pauline Johnson, Virginia Card, Ernest Wolffe, and some local talent, including the Kirkpatrick Orchestra and Lytton Orchestra.



In 1900 the Town Hall committee purchased a piano for the use of groups renting the place.

In 1911 the Town Hall committee felt the need to remodel. A screen canopy, lifted up above the existing roof was added. The screen separating the stage from the hall was pulled up and let down by a rope on pulleys. The huge, heavy screen blocked off the audience from the stage from side to side, top to bottom, leaving the audience and footlight with the mood of anticipation. On the screen were painted advertisements from merchants.

Around 1916 Mr. J Russel rented the Town Hall and fixed up the place for moving picture showings and by the 1920s, the Opera House was primarily used as a moving picture house. In this time, music was played during the moving picture shows to add to what was being seen on the screen. When Westerns and comics were on, fast music was played and when serious drama pictures were shown, operatic music was played on a player piano. Lew Cumming operated the player piano for a few months in this time. A few years later, the Cumming family ran the Opera House for a time.

By 1947, Mr. and Mrs. R Rogers carried on the Ashcroft theatre for a number of years, until the place was taken over by Bob Merritt who again remodelled the inside and outside, calling it "Sands Theater".

In 1979, Steve Todoruk of the Cache Creek Drive Inn purchased the Opera House and remodelled and opened on October 4, 1979 calling it the "Lands Theater". In the 1980s/90s, the Opera House was converted into a second hand store.

For a brief time in the early 2000s, the Opera House once again became home to live music and dinner theater. Today the Opera House sits empty.



Player Piano played by Lew Cumming at the Opera House/Town Hall in the 1920s



The Opera House still resides on the lot of land donated to the town by J.C Barnes all those years ago



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## Ashcroft Community Hall



Above: Community Hall used as a school in 1912

The Community Hall was originally built in 1899 by William Higginbottom, and served the purpose as a school. This two story building replaced a smaller one room school house, which was previously constructed on this site in 1889.

On the ground floor were children beginning from the first primer to the second reader and on the top floor one teacher taught students to the fourth reader. As the population increased, another room was added to the back and another teacher was hired.

With the building of a new school in 1922, the old two story building was converted into a Community Hall. Renovations were done by voluntary labour and materials bought and paid for by funds raised at entertainment functions.

The building was converted into a dance hall in the back part of the building and the top floor fitted up for an assembly room for entertainment and meetings, etc.

A committee composed of members of different community groups oversaw the management of the Community Hall.

The Community Hall was buzzing with activities including sporting events, dances, bazaars, teas, cards games, meetings, and more.

In 1932, the committee felt the dance floor was too small to accommodate large groups, and so the Hall was enlarged.

In 1949, the school population rose and once again the Hall became a classroom. This happened time and again when there was a shortage of space in the schools.

Events continue to be held in this historic building, such as dance and fitness classes, church services, town hall meetings, heritage events, and more.

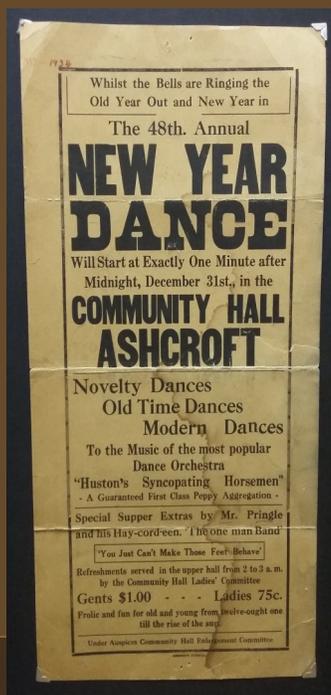
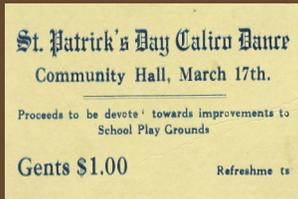
The Ashcroft Museum is open from Monday to Sunday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Come on down and learn some fascinating history about the area.

Located at 151 and 4th Street.

250-453-9232

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Our current Ashcroft Community Hall