

Townsend Auditorium

Until recently, mentioning the Townsend Auditorium meant the old gymnasium/auditorium in the old high school. Arnold Woodring, who grew up in the Clyde Park area, told me that the high school auditorium was the finest in the area when it was built. It featured a stage that held many performances; a first rate basketball court with not only courtside bleachers, but upper level bleachers too. The auditorium has not originally part of the high school, but was added later. The Broadwater County Museum has the blue prints that were drawn up for adding the gymnasium/auditorium.

A few years ago, the Museum received a grant to help us catalog and preserve maps stored at the Museum. One of the maps that we cataloged was a map of Townsend that showed every building in town and information about the buildings (floors, number of rooms, building materials). The map was created by an insurance company and was intended to be used by the town fire department.

On that map I noticed that there was an auditorium located about the middle of the 2nd block of South Spruce on the east side. I had never even heard of an auditorium separate from the schools.

After the creation of Townsend in 1883, the many halls, generally on the 2nd floor of retail businesses, served as locations for public gatherings. By 1898 the town had outgrown the halls and needed a true auditorium. According to the Townsend Star in March of 1899: "Townsend is about to realize a long felt want – an auditorium that had its origin a year ago. The stock has all been sold, article of incorporation filed with \$5,000 subscribed as capital stock."

Red rock was hauled in to the location on south Spruce for the foundation and with virtually all the carpenters in town working on the building, the new Auditorium was finished. It featured a "spring" floor (built on railroad springs), a beautiful chandelier, broad steps into the building and a large stage with beautiful drop curtains.

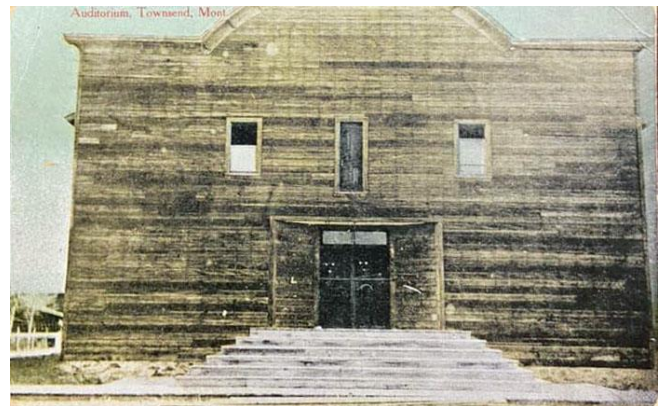
Many dances and traveling shows were hosted in the Auditorium. The formal balls



of the Knights of Pythias were held there; masquerade balls with elaborate costumes; midnight suppers; Charity Balls and Minstrel shows were all held at the building. The public memorial service for the “Unknown Soldier” was held there as well as trial for a murder case.

Over time the building deteriorated; the stockholders dwindled to just one – Peter J. Meloy. The steam furnaces were replaced with stoves. The Auditorium was still used for dances, but in the winter months it was a very cold building – the dancers danced a little faster and the musicians dressed warmly.

In the late 1940s the building had just outlived its usefulness and was torn down with the lumber going to a variety of buildings in the area including the old Deep Creek Pavilion.



Kenny Biggs eventually purchased the lots that once held the Auditorium and moved the old Frank Wieferich house from the Canton Valley (displaced by the creation of Canyon Ferry Lake). The house still stands at the south Spruce location.



Wieferich House today on South Cedar

The Museum does have some pictures of the Auditorium. I did find, on the internet, one of the original Stock Certificates that was sold to create the capital to build the Auditorium. If anyone has any old photos that show the Auditorium please contact the Linda Huth (curator) at the Museum and share the pictures with the Museum.



The information about the Townsend Auditorium came from the Broadwater Bygones which is available at the Broadwater County Museum. Visit the Broadwater County Museum for more information regarding the Auditorium, the insurance map or the blueprints for the “new” gymnasium/auditorium added to the old Broadwater County High School.