

PENTANGLE ARTS

Celebrating 46 Years!

As seen in the Vermont Standard – Dec. 3, 2020

Looking Back and Looking Forward

This past weekend there was a hint of light since COVID-19 cast its shadow over our programming back in March. Elise Brunelle, the new Executive Director of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, reached out to confirm dates for the VSO concert as part of the 2021 Summer Festival Tour in South Pomfret.

Her previous job at the Cape Town Opera in South Africa, a predominately black organization, was Director of Development, followed by her appointment to Managing Director in 2018. Given her background, it is no surprise that she is committed to expanding the VSO's effort toward inclusion, diversity, and equity across the organization. Coming from a theatre world and eager to reach out to wider and diverse audiences, we can expect the VSO's future programming to be "out of the box", exciting and very engaging.

Shortly after that great news, Peter Sanders, Artistic Director of the Central Vermont Chamber Festival (CVCF) reached out to confirm a concert date in August 2021. Peter, who should be in rehearsal for the Nutcracker, as a principal member of the New York City Ballet's Orchestra, is like so many musicians chomping at the bit to perform in a live setting once again. Fingers crossed that Pentangle will welcome the CVCF for its 25th year.

Back in Time

The architects retained to start the Town Hall Rejuvenation and Renovation Project requested that I assemble a timeline of work done on the building since its construction was completed in 1900. There are, no doubt, gaps that will be filled in down the road!!

Here are the high points in the building's life, compiled with the assistance of the Woodstock History Center, and my neighbor across the hall, our Town Clerk and History Center Board Member Charlie Degener III.

1899

A meeting was held to sell the Court House where the original Town Hall was housed, to the county, with funds going to the construction of a new Town Hall. The lot across from the St. James Church was selected and purchased for \$2,000 and \$20,000 is approved for the project.

August 10, 1899

Foundation was laid for what would become a two-floor building. The first floor the Town Hall seating 600 people, and the second floor the Opera House (which at the time was known as the Town Music Hall), with a seating capacity of about 400 on the main floor and additional 150 in the gallery.

1900

The Opera House officially opens October 12, 1900 with a production of Denman Thompson's "The Sunshine of Paradise Alley".

1927

Fire severely damages the Town Hall and the Opera House. It is decided to rebuild the structure in a Colonial Revival style of architecture, with the theatre on the first floor with an extended stage and raked floor. The second floor (the former Opera House) becomes a basketball court.

1947

Mrs. Owen Moon, in memory of her late husband Mr. Owen Moon, donates \$7,633 for new chairs and rugs for the Town Hall Theatre. Owen Moon shown interest in the theatre for many years and for nine years operated the theatre. Those seats remain there today; albeit re-upholstered as part of the late 80's renovation.

1960

Town Report states "the Town Hall has presented a problem for some time. Deteriorating each year in an increasingly shabby condition, it has been costing the Town upwards of \$5,000 a year in upkeep with no major repairs. A committee is tasked to what steps be taken to ensure the greatest and most profitable use the Town Hall can render the town.

1964

It was voted that a sum not to exceed \$20,000 be put towards a remodel of the second floor of the Town Hall for offices for the rent paying Agricultural Agencies. Farewell to the basketball court and the wide-open space that once was the Opera House.

1986

At Town Meeting March 4th, there was a Special Article asking the Town to raise or borrow \$168,740 over a ten-year period for the structural and safety improvements to the Town Hall. Conditions on this expenditure were that Pentangle contribute \$300,00 to cover the basic renovation of the theatre itself, which like most of the building did not meet fire safety codes.

Fun Facts:

The basketball court floor is still visible in the Town offices. If one were to pull up the carpet in the large conference room, no doubt it would be visible as well.

The ceiling of the original Opera House is still visible, as are the gallery seats in what is now the 3rd floor.

The black and white tile flooring installed in the foyer in 1929 are still visible in Pentangle's storage closet on the first floor.

The Pentangle office was the Select Board's meeting room when the building was built and after the 1927 fire became the Treasurer's office with a vault in what is now our storage closet.

More to come as my research continues!!