



Jeff Sigsworth

July 7 at 10:52pm

HAPPY 150TH!! :) 🇺🇸

Not only is this year Elyria's Bicentennial (200th birthday), it's also the 150th Birthday (Sesquicentennial) of our 1867 TOWN HALL on Court Street – part of the “new” 2004 Elyria City Hall Complex.

Planned from 1863 to 1866 (during the Civil War), and constructed mostly during 1867 at a cost of \$23,000, the Elyria Town Hall (built for both Village and Township government use) originally included space on the first floor for the Village jail or “lock up” and the Volunteer Fire Department. The upstairs had a large hall for Village Council and Township Trustees meetings, and for public meetings, lectures, high school graduations, and small musical productions. The back of the building was expanded in 1877-78 to include a proscenium arch and backstage area, so that larger plays & musical programs could be performed there. This space then became known as the Elyria Opera House, from 1879 to 1903. Both local performers (“home talent”) and traveling “stock companies” presented plays, musicals, dramas (Shakespeare, etc.), and other forms of entertainment in the gas-lighted hall, with seating for 960 people. Ticket prices ranged from 25 to 75 cents, depending on the show; and whether you sat in the “gallery” (balcony) or had reserved seats.

Some “celebrities” who performed or spoke here during 1879-1903 included: Cleveland actress Effie Ellsler, who starred in the first play in 1879; Susan B. Anthony, nationally known lecturer on Anti-Slavery, Temperance, and Women’s Suffrage issues; James A. Garfield, U.S. Representative from Ohio, running for president; the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Nashville, world-renowned a capella group specializing in spirituals; actors DeWolf Hopper & Georgiana “Georgie” Drew Barrymore – she was the mother of actors Ethel, Lionel & John Barrymore, and became great-grandmother of Drew Barrymore; Gilbert & Sullivan’s “H.M.S. Pinafore,” produced here in 1879, less than a year after its London debut; Fay Templeton, Josh Billings, and Denman Thompson – all famous 19th century actors or humorists; James Whitcomb Riley, the famous “Hoosier poet,” appearing along with “Frontier humorist” Edgar W. “Bill” Nye; the Noss Family Jollities, a world-famous musical comedy troupe (appeared here 3 times); and the Elyria Silver Cornet Band, also known as the Elyria Reed & Silver Band, first organized in 1869.

Even a few “magic lantern shows,” and later, early silent “motion pictures” (movies) were shown here, too. After the Opera House era, part of the first floor was used as a Greenline trolley car station, a bus station, and a World War I and World War II military induction center, among other functions. The new Elyria Theater on 2nd Street across from the Elks building (later called the Rialto Theater) replaced the old Opera House, serving the same purpose from 1904 to 1940.

The building was changed during additions & remodeling in 1904-05 and 1937-38; and survived a nearly devastating fire in 1927.

Most (but not all) City offices were moved out of the Town Hall / City Hall building in 1974, to the former Sears & Roebuck store on Broad Street – and returned about 30 years later, when this building and the adjacent Turner Block were renovated and incorporated into the expanded Elyria City Hall complex that opened in 2004.

The 1867 Elyria Town Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

HAPPY 150TH, ELYRIA TOWN HALL...!!

(Thank you to Norm Failing, Steven McQuillin, the late Bob Frederick, Connie Davis, Dick Bergman and others for their tireless past efforts in helping to save our 1867 Town Hall from demolition!)