

gen.  
← OLD MUSIC HALL

In the beginning when the beautiful city of Eau Claire had not become a reality, it's present location was not void of music; lavish nature revelled in music there: The music of the sighing wind moving through the dense virgin forests, the reverberating peals of thunder, the rushing water of the river, the gentle murmur of the brook and streamlet, and over and above all this the enchanting songs of the winged throng of the sky. This and more awaited the coming of our first settlers and they came with a new song in their hearts, a song of great adventure and high hopes.

A hundred years ago some of those adventurous men who had founded the settlement were engaged in the task of building the Eau Claire we know now. It's aspect then is difficult for us to visualize: a small group of houses, board sidewalks built above the level of the dusty main street and as far "out" as Newton Street it was necessary to carry a lantern after dark to avoid stumbling over cows asleep in the deep, warm sand. Indians were still feared as a very real danger to life and possessions. In spite of the many disadvantages connected with a pioneer settlement, we know there were individuals who undertook to realize plans for something other than material needs. And <sup>since</sup> music is our constant companion, ever present in sorrow and in joy, so it is natural that it was the first cultural development in the young community, and that this culture was indeed suffering no neglect is evidenced by the erection of it's first Music Hall in 1867.

The building was located on the northwest corner of South Barstow Street and Grand Avenue East, (At that time known as Kelsey Street) and it served the community until 1871 when it was destroyed by fire. During the years 1873-1874 it was rebuilt, with stores on the ground floor and the Hall up-stairs, and was designated as the City Opera House until the Eau Claire Opera House was built in 1883 when the old name Music Hall was resumed.

After many years of useful service, Old Music Hall was doomed to be replaced by larger accommodations to serve the growing population. In 1896 it was razed to make place for the Truax Building which in it's turn has given way to the march of time and a different type of architecture now occupying that location. It is sad indeed to record that during the razing Old Music Hall collapsed, causing the death of three respected and valued citizens: William Dean, an officer in the Phoenix Manufacturing Company, Nicholas Roach, a member of one of the very early families to settle in the town, and Halvor C. Olson, foreman with the Madison Street Manufacturing Company. While there is no record available of the accommodations of the first Hall, the second Hall was equipped with a stage of ample proportions to serve the requirements of the variety of entertainments presented there, as well as Public Meetings.

Probably the first event of widest interest in Eau Claire was a recital by Ole Bull, the celebrated Norwegian violinist in 1869. In 1868 Ole Bull was married to Sara Chapman Thorp, the daughter of the Hon. Joseph G. Thorp, one of Eau Claire's prominent citizens. The following is quoted from the Press: "When Ole Bull the great musician who, more than any other artist made the violin sing and speak and weep and laugh and triumph, for it seemed when he drew the bow across the strings as if earth and heaven trembled in delighted sympathy, when this great musician in a room looking off upon the sea, surrounded by his favorite instruments of music, closed his eyes in death the world mourned his departure. Sixteen crowded steamers fell into the line of his funeral procession to carry his body to the mainland, fifty thousand of his countrymen gathered in the amphitheater of the hills and it is said that

to late date