

THE TWEED PLAYHOUSE

In 1854, an organization of Irish Protestants, known as the Loyal Orange Lodge, formed a branch in the Tweed community. In November of 1860, Orange Lodge Branch 74, built its first Lodge Room on the hill west of Tweed, close to and now part of, the Victoria Cemetery. In 1868, the lodge temporarily shared the building with the students of Tweed when the Tweed School S.S. no. 8, was destroyed in a fire and so, during the day it was used by the children with their teachers and on certain evenings, the lodge held meetings. In 1918, the lodge was burnt to the ground but not before the lodge had discontinued its use and had re-established themselves on Tweed Lot 31, at the north-west corner of Colborne and Jamieson St E. This large building of red brick can be seen while approaching the traffic lights coming from the community centre and is what we now know as the Tweed Playhouse.

The building was constructed in 1913 and set with two intentions in mind. The top floor was to facilitate the Orange Lodge, while the bottom would host community theatre, local events, movies, meetings, and dances, as an auditorium. The lodge ran in this way until 1939 when the building was sold to the Tweed Order of Independent Odd Fellows, no. 290, and the Orange Lodge was disbanded, its members affiliated elsewhere, to such places as Thomasburg.

During this time, the top floor was split into the IOOF, Rebekah's, and Order of Eastern Star sharing the west side and the Masonic Temple, on the east side which was closed to non-members. While the bottom floor was used for functions and frequently leased for local guilds, churches, the Tweed Fairboard, the Agricultural Society, other businesses and private functions. In 1943 to 1944, Marston Minerals Inc. used the building, then later the Brewers' Warehousing Company Ltd. In the 1950's until the 1970's. After the warehousing company left, the building bore the signs of two separate ceramic manufacturing companies and an electronics assembly plant. The building, while being deeply rooted in the town history, has also been tied to other pillars of the community, including Rayburn Insurance, the broker who had insured the building for years, the earliest record in the Tweed Heritage Centre being a receipt of contract dated 1958. The building continued to be rented well into the 1990's but its capacity to house the dramatic arts was not restored until the 1980's.

In the dawn of the 1980's, the Tweed community undertook a restoration of the Playhouse to equip it once again for the facilities to run theatrical productions and to return it to the cultural and educational centre it was to the community. After great preparation and dedication of community volunteers, who had put in over 250 hours of volunteering, the Playhouse opened again in 1984 for the Bicentennial celebration of Ontario's formation long ago, as Upper Canada. As part of the restoration, a gorgeously painted curtain which had been purchased in Peterborough from the time of the auditorium's creation, was returned to its glorious original state.

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Photo courtesy of Tweed Heritage Centre

For the community as a whole, this was a great representation of the willingness to come together. The community involvement did not stop with the fundraising and renovations but continued into the facility's management, through Senior Friends of the Tweed Playhouse, a group of elders in the community who prepared the programs and the productions each year. Through the Senior Friends of the Tweed Playhouse, the youth of Tweed brought eloquently to the stage such productions as, "The Sound of Music", "The Phantom of the Music Room", and "The Swinging Piper". In recognition of the community's sense of volunteering, two members of the organization were given provincial recognition at an Outstanding Achievement Award Ceremony held in Toronto, by Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Culture, February 14th, 1986.

By this point, the Tweed Theatre was at its prime, hosting events during the year and its summer filled with childhood education in the art of theatre and drama. Even more so, the program provided work experience to three summer students, who helped the program run alongside the volunteer committee and the Senior Friends, by directing, teaching, and instructing the children by creating, managing, and maintaining the stage and props. One being a very young Barry Chambers caught on camera in a Tweed News article in the summer of 1984.

Nearing the turn of the millennium, the summer program was transferred to the Pavilion in Tweed Memorial Park and the building fell into a state of disuse. From time to time, one could swear they heard a band playing from inside and one could guess the top floor was rented at one point and quite possibly still could be. But what happens there now, as one passes underneath the mysteries enigma, with its dusted windows and its air of foreboding, like a skeleton of a once lively place now turned daunting in its remnants, peering down to the street below, is left purely

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to the imagination of those who pass underneath its dark gaze. We may never know what it is now, or what the future the building holds, but at least we can now say what it was; an Orange Lodge, IOOF Lodge, Rebekah Lodge, Masonic Lodge, Order of the Eastern Star, auditorium, a dance hall, rental hall, two ceramic companies, an electronic assembly plant, a summer theatre camp and now, a wonder for those who pass by it.



Photos courtesy of Tweed Heritage Centre