



Charles Mickle,
Mayor and Visionary

The Gravenhurst Opera House officially opened on March 12th, 1901 with the performance, "Days of the Year". The Opera House, referred to by many as Mickle's Folly, after staunch supporter and then Mayor Charles Mickle, for what seemed like a lavish dream for a town of its size. However, this historic gem has survived one depression, two world wars, weathered many a storm and the indignity of a wrecking ball. "So how is Mickle's Folly progressing?"

The Days of the Year, the first play presented at the Opera House on March 12th, 1901, was written by Hamilton, Ontario playwright Jean Newton. Tickets? They ranged from 25 - 50 cents each!

All residents understood Gravenhurst needed another Town Hall to replace the burned-out frame that remained from three years earlier at Brock and First. However, it was the size and expense of the growing structure that fostered concern. Emerging from a countrywide depression, the whole project seemed extravagant to those townfolk struggling to regain their financial footing. By the time rumours surfaced of arriving fleur-de-lis stained glass windows and fancy brass electricals that were delivered by boat, from France at a cost of \$50 each to adorn a second floor opera house ... "An opera house?! All we need is a new Town Hall, don't we?! Does Mickle figure money grows on trees for all of us?" Keep in mind that 1900 Gravenhurst was, like all rural towns in Canada, a two-tier society. There were those with and those without and a minority with attachments to the money strings, made the decisions. Locals thought the whole town hall project was a white elephant; just another pricey indulgence by politicians at the taxpayers' expense! In spite of the grumbling, Charles Mickle's vision for Gravenhurst would prevail and 118 years later, stands proudly as a symbol of community, culture and prosperity.



Large or small, casual or corporate - The Opera House is located in the heart of Gravenhurst, close to restaurants, hotels, the Muskoka Wharf and historic Steamships as well as many unique shops to choose from.

We offer fully trained and experienced staff ready to serve you. This makes our facility a perfect location for the most versatile production, meeting, presentation, screening, corporate event, lecture or class. Our facilities include a 320-seat theatre that is air conditioned, fully accessible and provides the latest in lighting and sound technology. Trillium Court with a licensed bar is perfect for a reception, luncheon or gathering of any kind.

Visit our website to learn more about our upcoming shows, purchase tickets on-line, learn how to get involved or to obtain information on renting our facilities.

Muskoka's Oldest Entertainment Tradition

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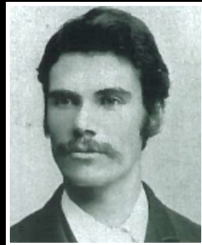
GRAVENHURST'S CULTURAL CORNERSTONE SINCE 1901
GRAVENHURST OPERA HOUSE
MUSKOKA'S OLDEST
ENTERTAINMENT TRADITION





FACES OF THE OPERA HOUSE: (left to right)
Charmion King, Kate Reid & Donald Sutherland

Designed by Architect, John Francis Brown, the Gravenhurst Town Hall and Opera House would officially open its doors to the public on March 12th, 1901. In the 118 years since, what was once considered a pricey indulgence has witnessed more people crossing its threshold than the entire population of Canada at the time it was built and that's by conservative estimate! This venerable town jewel has the distinction of being Gravenhurst's most treasured public building; perhaps even Muskoka's.



Architect
John Francis Brown



Restoration Work
in 1994



Over the years, the Gravenhurst Opera House has served as host to a variety of events and functions, housing everything from criminal court proceedings to war rallies, bingos, art exhibits, musical concerts and even Santa Claus. But theatre productions have and continue to be the main attraction. In the years prior to World War I, Gravenhurst was on the tour circuit for travelling stock companies from both Canada and the United States. Repertoire companies would often present several productions along with vaudeville performances for between 25 cents and 50 cents a ticket during their three to four-night runs. Publicity for the Boyer-Vincent Company's visit in October 1914 promised "all attractions are presented complete in every detail with special scenery and electrical effects." In 1934, John Holden, a Toronto actor with a dream of reviving summer stock theatre in Canada, brought his Good Companions Theatre Company to the Gravenhurst Opera House. For eight consecutive summers, from 1948 through 1955, the Straw Hat Players performed 63 different productions at the Opera House. Alumni included many of Canada's most talented performers, including Kate Reid, Ted Follows, Charmion King, Barbara Hamilton, Araby Lockhart and a young Donald Sutherland. Summer Theatre continued with the long running Muskoka Festival from 1972 until the fall of 1995. A new era began in 2014 with the celebration of the 80th season of summer theatre in Muskoka and continues today!



The Opera House weathered threats of closure over the years but on February 23rd, 1993, the Ministry of Labour closed the doors due to "unsafe conditions" and an Opera House Renovation Committee was formed to raise the over \$3 Million to get the doors back open.



In retrospect, those millions of footsteps would suggest, even to last century's most grizzled skeptic, a demonstrable need for the structure. Mickle's Folly has endured to prove itself Mickle's vision and not a folly at all. With the Town's new Cultural Plan, a new Opera House strategic business plan and the return of summer theatre, it looks like Mickle's vision will continue for a long time to come. The Opera House is owned and operated by the Town of Gravenhurst's Department of Community Growth and Development and continues to host musical concerts, film, comedy and live theatre all year round and is very proud to welcome visitors from near and far, even those from the North Pole.

Summer 2019 marked the 85th Season of Summer Theatre in Canada which was started right here in Muskoka in 1934 by John Holden.



John Holden