

## *Wild West settlers still wanted their opera, theater*



*Mandel Opera House located at the southwest corner of Sixth and Main. From 1894 to 1924 the building was used for Mesa County offices including the Mesa County Courthouse. Main Street Bagel's is located there now.  
Museum of Western Colorado photo*

By Kathy Jordan

Settlers who moved to the “Wild West” wanted to have the civilized niceties they had left behind, and apparently the theatre was one of the niceties topping their list.

The first Grand Junction News story that an opera house was to be built in Grand Junction appeared on Feb. 2, 1883. Adelphus.G. Mandel of New York had been in town that week and had purchased several lots. One was at the corner of Sixth and Main Street, where Main Street Bagels is now located. While in town he had completed arrangements to construct a two-story brick building, with the upper story to be used as an opera house, and the main floor rented out as a public meeting hall.

Throughout the spring, summer and fall The News ran little blurbs on the building progress.

By July the roof was being put on, and Grand Junction's first "skyscraper" was almost finished. The News reported that there was a great view of the surrounding country from the roof.

By mid-August the interiors of both stories were plastered, and Mr. Butler, the contractor, was confident the opera house would be open by the end of August.

Apparently, however, the opera house wasn't open by the middle of October, because a one-liner news brief on Oct 22 revealed that Mandel had just ordered 120 chairs for the structure. They didn't arrive until Dec. 22.

On Oct. 22, 1883, the Republican convention was held at the Mandel building, and three days later the students of Mrs. Carpenter's Conservatory of Music held their closing exercise for the second term there.

William Pean Harbottle and Phosa McAllister were among actors who appeared at the Mandel Hall, as it was being called by 1884. The Republicans, the Methodist Episcopal Church and many other groups continued to use the building until 1888.

According to 1888 Mesa County records, the county signed a three-year lease on the building. During that time there were several owners, including W.T. Carpenter, president of Mesa County Bank, who added a vault and a 40-foot extension to the rear of the building for \$800. In 1894 then-owner Charles Thompson, who owned the nearby City Drug, sold it to Mesa County. Mesa County then used the building for various county offices until the completion of the new court house in 1924.

## **Mesa Opera Rink**

The Mesa Opera Rink, built in fall 1885 by W.E. Lynch and George E. Haskell, had a little longer lifespan than the Mandel Opera House.

The opening night for the "Rink", which, according to Webster's Dictionary, means expansive wooden floor, was Dec. 19, 1885. The Rice Lumber furnished wood for the 35-by-75-foot frame building, which could seat 300 people. It featured a hardwood floor suitable for dancing, and a stage with a set of scenery. The "Rink" was on the site of the present Mesa Theatre.

From reports in The News, the "Rink" was a popular venue for events held in Grand Junction:

Soon after the "Rink" opened in 1885, the Baptist, Southern Methodist and Christian Churches had a joint Christmas celebration there, complete with two Christmas Trees.

On Jan. 16, 1886, Grand Junction businessmen gave a ball for the cattlemen which, according to The News “was a gigantic success and the dance floor was filled until the Moon was old”. The receipts, after expenses, were donated to the public school library.

A December 1887 masquerade ball was “a very grand affair with a large number of costumes brought in from Salt Lake and Denver.”

Also in December 1887 the Masonic New Year’s Eve Banquet-Ball was held at the “Rink” with approximately 120 attending.

On Dec. 2, 1889, the Methodist and Presbyterian Sunday Schools gave a joint Christmas Eve party at the “Rink”. The whole town was invited.

On Oct. 11, 1890, St. Matthew’s Guild gave the first of a series of balls to benefit the Episcopal Church. It was such a success both socially and financially that the balls became an annual event.

During the years the “Rink” was open to numerous traveling theatre groups who came through town by rail with their scenery and costumes. They would make Grand Junction one of their stops for a performance.

When the “Rink” closed, that wasn’t the end for opera houses in Grand Junction. Stay tuned for next week’s story about the best-known opera house in Grand Junction--the Park Opera House.