

Dance Hall Catered to Families



The 1941 public dance hall license that Will Coulson purchased for \$25 for the Orchard Mesa Pavilion. Document courtesy of Ken Coulson Jr.

By Kathy Jordan

When I wrote about local dance halls last year I mentioned the Orchard Mesa Pavilion, or Coulson's Dance Hall as it was also known. Since then I have learned the story behind this dance hall, which was a family affair.

Three members of the Coulson family, Ken Sr., Mae and Harold, did an interview for the Mesa County Historical Society Oral History project in 1984 and told the story.

The idea for the dance hall came about when Bill Coulson, Ken's father, and a friend were talking, and the friend told Bill that he would supply the gravel for the cement.

The hall was built about 150 feet south of the Coulson house east of 28 Road. The dance floor was 32x58 feet with a 14-foot lobby on the north and west side. The 16x20-foot concession stand was on the south.

Harry Davidson built the dance hall, and John Lehman laid the maple floor, which took one week. Lehman started with a small block in the middle, continuing around so you always danced with the grain of the wood. Ken Coulson recalls that the holes for the flooring were hand-drilled because at the time the Coulsons had no electricity. People would tell them that it was the best dance floor between Chicago and Salt Lake.

The Orchard Mesa Pavilion opened in June 1925.

The inside was decorated with twisted crepe paper draped around the hall. After the Coulsons got electricity, colored globe lights were installed. The bandstand was set to the side so it took no space on the dance floor. Ken Coulson recalls that the dance hall had large windows and doors that opened in the summertime so that it was like dancing outside. There were no tables and chairs for sitting and talking. Instead, benches were placed around the lobby.

The Coulsons' blind uncle, Allen Coulson, a piano tuner, kept the ever-present piano in superb shape. He also ran the concession stand, which served hotdogs, pop, candy, and ice cream from the Jones-Enstrom Velvet Ice Cream Company. It also served as a check-stand for coats.

The supper waltz was popular. When a man brought his girlfriend they would dance all evening and eat about 11 p.m. The menu was chicken sandwiches and cake, which Mrs. Bill Coulson had made, along with coffee.

To advertise the dances Ken Coulson Sr., then a teenager, would walk up and down Main Street wearing a sandwich signboard made of oilcloth. The board had a white background with "Dance tonight at the Orchard Mesa Pavilion" painted in red. Ken said that if he saw a girl he knew he would duck out of sight.

The dances were on Wednesdays and Saturdays and once in a while on Fridays. Wednesday featured "old-time dances" like the two-step, square dance and polka. Saturday was ballroom-dancing night.

Bands were mostly local talent. They included Armand De beque and his five-piece band, Hap Harris & family, Charlie Fulton, Mike Regan, Gerald Welch, Dewy Lloyd, Hollis McCabe, Ella Pinkerton, and Monty Delford and Meda Taylor.

Tickets were normally 10 cents a dance, three for a quarter, or \$1 for the evening. Occasionally, there were bargain prices—the so-called "jitney" (slang for a nickel) dances. Some people would purchase three tickets because they planned to dance only three times. Then they would purchase three more, and finally they would decide to purchase the \$1 ticket for whole evening. The \$1 ticket was the wise way to go because a band would play an average of 50 numbers a night. Dances usually lasted until 1:30 or 2. a.m.

The Coulsons could make between \$100 on Saturday and \$150 on a special night like Halloween. That was a lot of money in the late 1920s and 1930s, when a month's salary of \$150 was considered good.

After the dance hall was closed in the summer of 1944, it was cut in half and re-used as two homes located in the 200 block of 28 Road just about one-half block from the original location.