



historically speaking

## THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

# THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

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### Greetings from the President

Welcome to winter although to date it hasn't been too bad. The picture on the right gives you an idea of what winter was like years ago on Main Street in Cass City. We do not have a date for this picture but obviously it was taken prior to the coming of the automobile. (circa early 1900's)

The Cass City Area Historical and Genealogy Society held the first meeting of 2012 on February 20. The program for the evening was presented by Kate Van Auken, Rawson Memorial Library Director, as she informed the group of an exciting project for the Society in conjunction with the Library. It is not something that can be done overnight but down the road it will be great for you "on line" people with a wealth of information on the Cass City Area. We will keep you informed as the project progresses.

As you know with each of these newsletters we try to include a bit of local history. After 16 years of doing this we are running out of topics. So we would like you to tell us of things that you are interested in and would like to see us include in our Newsletters. Please let us know.

**Katie Jackson, President**



*Our trivia for this newsletter is on early entertainment in the Cass City Area.  
From "The Way It Was-1854-1995"*

Entertainment is defined as a "show to amuse or give pleasure". Throughout the years the Cass City Area has given to its citizens a variety of entertainment. We must remember that before the day of radio, movies, television, the internet, text messaging, etc., etc., the entertainment for a community had to come from within and Cass City was no exception. Life in Cass City one hundred years ago was very pleasant, but lacking the many conveniences which we now take for granted. Streets were not paved, there was no sewage system and where there were sidewalks, they were made of boards on which one could walk with considerable noise. During this time period the people of Cass City and the surrounding rural areas were independent and resourceful in providing entertainment.

In the very early days in farm areas such as ours, the only entertainment was probably held in

the local one room country schools or local township halls and were programs consisting of songs, and recitations done by local men and women's groups and school children.

In the latter part of the 1800's, a local gentleman, James Hitchcock, decided to build a new building for his general store. It was to be three stories with his business on the first floor and an opera house on the second and third floors. This structure was called the "Opera House Block" and was located at the northwest corner of Main and Leach streets - which, by the way, still stands. Kritzman's occupied the lower floor for many years, followed by Hendrians Furniture, and today the VIP Beauty Salon.

The description of the Opera House in the Cass City Chronicle, 1898 was: "*The entrance to the opera house is on Leach Street. One may ascend either by stairway or elevator* (something

relatively new to Cass City at that time) and the various entrances to the auditorium with balcony, galleries, stage dressing rooms, store rooms, etc., are all well arranged with an eye to convenience. The carpentry work has been done by Landon, Eno and Keating, in their usual workmanlike style. In front of the auditorium and facing Main Street is a dining room, reception room or ballroom of ample dimensions for either use. We are pleased that Mr. Hitchcock has been able to push it to completion."

The auditorium, stage and dressing rooms of the Opera House were a source of pride to the people of Cass City. It opened an era of entertainment in the community with high school dramatics as well as programs by other local groups. Traveling theater companies presented plays and for many years during each winter season lecture series were booked. It was also the scene of high school graduation until the high school (the old high school)



Opera House in the 1920's

was built in 1927. A combination of things - the new High School built in 1927 with its gymnasium/ auditorium and the great depression in the 1930's, probably led to the abandonment of the Opera House. Its stage and auditorium were converted to a bowling alley and pool room. The open area between the third floor balcony and the stage were boarded up and today very little remains of the elegance of the original Opera House. One thing that does remain is the "graffiti" that still adorns the walls of the dressing rooms and hallways with signatures and dates of Cass City people that participated in the many plays, programs and graduation exercises through the years.

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Our next issue will contain more information about some of the earlier forms of entertainment in Cass City.



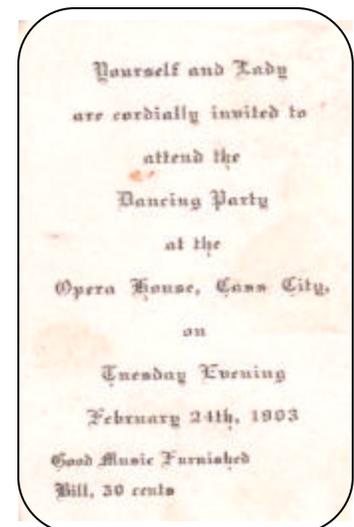
This is a group picture of the cast of a patriotic play performed in 1920. It was taken from the third floor balcony looking down on the second floor stage. This might give you some idea of the elegance of the Opera House.



This is an invitation to the graduation exercises for the Cass City High School class of 1922 held at the Opera House.



The graduation invitation at left came in this handsome envelope with the date of the event on the outside.



This is an invitation to a Dancing Party printed on cardstock.