

# 72 Littleton Opera House (Littleton Town Building)

Town of Littleton, Grafton County, New Hampshire

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A unique Queen Anne styled gem, originally known as the Littleton Town Building, but most recently, and more commonly, called the Littleton Opera House, sits in its prominent location watching over Littleton, New Hampshire. This impressive, late 19<sup>th</sup> century building is located at the corner of Main, Union and Cottage Streets and over the years has served many important cultural and civic roles.

In 1881, Henry Lowell Tilton, a businessman and owner of the Tilton Opera Block on Main Street, wanted to build an auditorium for cultural events on his property, adjacent to where the Littleton Opera House currently stands. As he began planning for the auditorium, he realized it was unlikely that the residents of Littleton would support the idea of an auditorium when more important civic buildings were needed. However, years later with the construction of the Littleton Town Building, came the Opera House, which was housed in one end of the building. While not exactly where he wanted it, Mr. Tilton and some other determined folks, ultimately got their performance center. Construction of the building began in 1894 and doors opened on June 15, 1895.

The Littleton Opera House is a good example of a local municipal building designed in the Victorian style. Designed by Howard & Austin architects out of Brockton, Massachusetts and costing \$33,836, the rather large, clapboard structure stands three stories tall in the front and five stories tall in the rear and boasts a hexagonal tower that extends from the northwest corner of the building.

The Littleton Opera House has been used for many civic purposes over the years including a jail, a courthouse and the police station. Over the course of the years numerous cultural events have also occurred here, including musical, theatrical and political events. In 1941, a birthday celebration for Bette Davis, a frequent patron of the Opera House, was one of the largest events ever held, attracting more than 10,000 people. This momentous occasion featured a 200 pound cake that hung from the center of the Opera House's auditorium. Other events held over the years included a performance by the internationally recognized Dunbar Male Quartet and Bell Ringers, the original monologues of the stage and radio personality Cornelia Otis Skinner, and performances by the brilliant violinist David Rubinoff, featuring his \$100,000 Stradivarius violin.

Even though the Littleton Opera House has gone through several renovations, the interior and the exterior of the building look very much as they did in 1895. In 2005, the building was closed to remedy structure, fire and life safety concerns. Five years and over one million dollars were invested in new windows, doors, siding, and safety code compliance upgrades for a revitalized mission in May 2010. The Littleton Opera House was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

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