

ERNIE BROWN'S MEMOIRS - COMMUNITY HALL ENTERTAINMENT

Last month I introduced you to Ernie Brown, a fascinating Mountain resident who recorded his life on Hamilton Mountain a century ago. His recollections are priceless and I would like to relate his experience with community entertainment on the mountain.

About 1894, Mr. Duncan, a grocer, took over the grocery store on the ground floor of the Barton Community Hall, one block north of the old Holly Trinity Church on the corner of Genesee and Upper James. One of my chores as a 14 year-old was to drive Mr. Duncan in a wagon to pick up groceries from Lumsden Brothers Wholesaler. One day Mr. Duncan, while talking to a customer, quarry owner George Gallagher, got the idea of forming a Barton Literary Society for the Duff Town (Upper James) neighbourhood, using the community hall above the store. In those days there were no radios, no electricity, no water, no phones, no "a lot of things", and a literary society could provide entertainment for the long winter nights on the mountain. Sometimes the performances were so bad, they were funny and provoked a lot of laughter.

Mr. William Bruce (Bruce Park), a respected member of the community was one of the first to contribute to the entertainment. He stood on the hall platform with an open book and gave a reading, but never once looked at the book. What a splendid feat of memory! There were skits about humorous honeymoon situations, confusion at the train station, a modest lady trying to cross a fence style, as well as lots of songs. Harry Bull (Bulls Lane) had a splendid singing voice and Sam Kirk would sing, "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen" in a way that you could never forget. Store owner, Mr Duncan and Millie Buick sang duets and Oscar Heas played jigs and reels on his violin. Another couple performed "Stuttering Willie". The dialogue was exceedingly comical, helped along by a gentleman with a large handlebar mustache seated in the second row, who laughed so heartily that it was contagious. But the funniest of all the turns was Miss Alice Beckett (Beckett Drive) reciting, "The Bishop and the Cow".



Photo courtesy Sandra Beveridge
Barton Community Hall on the second floor c. 1915



Photo courtesy R. Williamson
Café Palazzo, the former Township Hall
c. 2000.

Mountain Memories, written by historian, Robert Williamson on behalf of HMHS, appears monthly. See the Society's website (hamiltonheritage.ca) for information on events and publications.

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