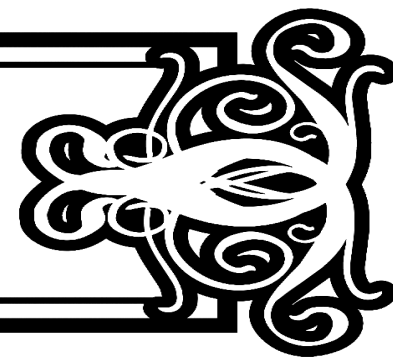


BUTTE ONE OF SEVERAL OPERA HOUSES IN 1890S



Gold fever hit Cripple Creek in 1890 and a gold rush like no other brought thousands to the mountainsides west of Pikes Peak. A boomtown atmosphere called for entertainment and there were plenty of things to entertain - gambling halls and saloons that lined the streets of the mining district, madams, dance hall girls and medicine shows.

Theater got an early start in the district - Cripple Creek and Victor both sported grand opera houses. Both are gone now, but the Butte lives on.

Located on Meyer's Avenue in the heart of the red light district, The Grande Opera House produced some of the most elegant, refined and tasteful entertainment in the whole of the district. Its ruins remind today's visitors of the gold days gone by when going to the opera was a typical mining camp social event. There was also the Lyric Opera House where in 1913, the lowest of miners and highest of society rubbed elbows to watch George Coplen fight the famed Jack Dempsey.



The Victor Opera House was located where the Alta Vista Station is now on the east end of downtown Victor. It hosted well known shows and musicals during its heyday.

Another historical venue that began in the heyday of the gold rush still houses live entertainment today, in the form of live melodrama and professional theater.

The "Butte Concert and Beer Hall" premiered in 1896, when

proprietors Halbekann & Hertz featured nightly entertainment with a Ladies' Vienna Orchestra. Some time later the theater re-premiered as the Butte Opera House under the management of D.R. McArthur. Within two years, numerous clubs and lodges were sponsoring parties and benefits at the Butte on a regular basis.

The opera house experienced limited success, and over the next several years underwent a series of makeovers; first it was transformed into the Butte Hall Dancing Academy, followed by The Watt Brothers Furniture Company, back to a theater (this time under the name Teller Hall,) onto a skating rink, a secondhand store, a weapons cache (the space was then called The Armory,) an auto garage, home of the Cripple Creek Auto Company, and eventually fell into disuse, mainly a storage facility for the fire department located below.

DRAMA OF THE GOLD CAMP UNFOLDS ON STAGES

Early in 1999, the city of Cripple Creek brushed aside some of the dust and saw a lost jewel hidden amongst the rubble. The City began extensive renovations to refurbish the Butte with fresh paint, Victorian-era wallpaper, and period chandeliers. A 1,350-square foot stage spans the main room, with seating for 174 guests. The sound booth is equipped with state-of-the-art movie projectors and sound equipment. A snack bar, roomy dressing rooms and tastefully decorated lavatories complete

the historic atmosphere.

The Butte Opera House is currently the home of the Thin Air Theatre Company, a professional acting group that focuses on presenting authentic Victorian melodrama to the people of Cripple Creek.

This tradition of presenting classic melodrama in Cripple Creek dates back to the late 1940s. In 1949 Wayne and Dorothy Mackin purchased the Imperial Hotel and began producing original melodramas in the basement of the hotel. They called their theater The Gold Bar Room. For 60-plus years the Mackins and their acting company, The Imperial Players, performed to summer crowds. In the early 1990s the last Imperial show was performed as the Imperial became a casino and the Gold Bar Room closed.

After a few dark years, the traditional Cripple Creek Melodrama was granted a new lease on life. When final renovations were completed on the Butte Opera House in 2000, the summer melodrama moved to its new home. Now in a brand new theatre, the melodrama was conceived and produced, not by Wayne and Dorothy Mackin, but by their son and daughter-in-law, Steve and Bonnie Mackin and then by producer, Stacy Mackin - the third generation of Mackins to produce melodrama in Cripple Creek.

In 2007 a new company, comprised of actors from the Imperial and Cripple Creek Players days, carried on the melodrama tradition and adding more professional shows to the season. The melodrama is a fun-filled family outing with professional actors, stunning hand-painted sets and period costumes. Audiences can boo at villains and cheer for heroes in this traditional form of melodrama, just as audiences have in Cripple Creek since the 1940s. This year's melodrama is in October.

The 2009 show season included the two summer musicals - *The Fantasticks* and *Godspell*. The melodrama was moved to fall and was an original adaption for the Butte - *The Lost Soul of Cripple Creek*. The ever popular *A Cripple Creek Christmas Carol* returns for the holidays.