



Municipal Building, ca. 1910

In Celebration of Skowhegan's Bicentennial

A Handsome Structure- An Era in the Cultural History of Skowhegan.

In celebration of Skowhegan's Bicentennial, the Skowhegan Opera House Committee will host a free public reception and building tour on **Thursday, October 26th beginning at 5:30 followed by a historical presentation by local historian, Melvin Burnham, at 6:30 in the council room.**

Mr. Burnham has researched the history of the Skowhegan Municipal Building and Opera House through original documents and vintage photos from the collections of the Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center, and newspaper articles of the time found in the collections of the U.S. Library of Congress. Mr. Burnham will use those documents and images to share the history in his presentation entitled "A Handsome Structure- An Era in the Cultural History of Skowhegan."

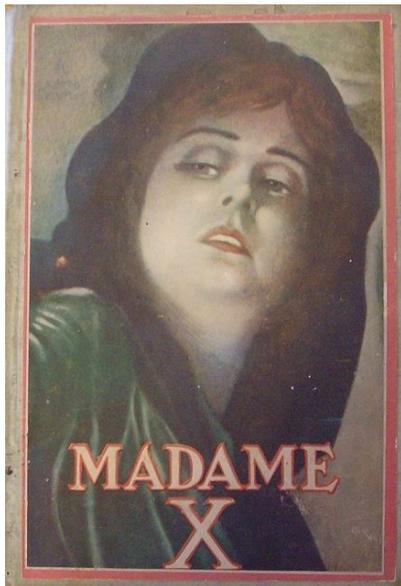
Within days of the disastrous fire which destroyed Coburn Hall in 1904, Skowhegan citizens began to plan for a new structure that would meet their cultural and governmental needs of the time.

In February 1909 the citizens of Skowhegan celebrated the grand opening of their new Municipal Building and 900 seat Opera House on the site of the former Heselton Hotel and before that Ichabod Russell's Tavern. Architect John Calvin Stevens of Portland had drafted a "Handsome structure" and citizens related that "it is hard to realize that so marked an advance in our facilities for holding large public gatherings can have taken place so quickly in our own community."

The Somerset Reporter (2/9/1909) reported that "More than 700 attended the "8:00 pm (opening) to witness the exercises of turning over the keys, the lights were turned on from the basement to

the roof and every part of the building was thrown open to inspection.” “Kendall’s (J. Abbott Kendall) orchestra, who had kindly consented to donate their services for the evening, played some of their finest selections, among them the overture from Forty-five Minutes from Broadway, the entertainment which was to take place in the opera house the next Tuesday evening.”

This community icon has a rich history. The auditorium hosted numerous political exchanges, orators, professional concerts, and Broadway performances as well as programs supporting the Red Cross, Liberty Bonds, and the KKK. Minstrels, lectures, commencements, school and community-based plays and concerts occupied the grand stage. Antonio Moreno, Gloria Swanson, Hoot Gibson, Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Flash Gordon, The Lone Ranger and Tonto, and the News Reels entertained and informed movie-goers on a regular basis through silent and talkie motion pictures.



October 3, 1911



December 30, 1909