

Photo of the Month

Rogers Opera House



The Rogers Opera House, late 1890s (Negative # N001843)

Before the days of the motion picture, Americans found amusement in live theater and musical performances. During that time, the opera house played much the same role as the movie theater played from the 1920s on. Indeed, opera houses played an even more vital role as the scene of not only amusement but also of important public meetings and political debates.

The Rogers Opera House, seen here in the late 1890s shortly after it was built, was located upstairs in the business block at the southwest corner of Walnut and First Streets. Over the next two decades the Opera House was the site of musical performances, plays, minstrel shows, political debates, lectures, and the annual Fireman's Ball. Events there became so popular that in 1903 the building was remodeled, adding another story, dressing rooms, and a balcony to increase seating capacity to 650.

After 1918 motion picture houses lured patrons away from live performances. By the 1930s the Rogers Opera House was silent, its windows bricked in and its chairs sold as antiques. One set of three chairs is in the collections of the Rogers Historical Museum, as are programs of Opera House performances and a few other items of Opera House memorabilia.