

Way We Were

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Park City's Grand Opera House

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As Park City grew from an up-and-coming camp into a successful mining town, theaters, opera houses, and social halls were built on Main Street. In an era before home entertainment systems, these structures played a vital role in communities throughout the country. The Park Opera House, also known as Society Hall¹, was located at 354 Main. The Park Opera House featured masquerade and grand balls, shows, lectures, political talks, comedians, séances, graduation ceremonies, fraternal organizations' lodge meetings, and other community meetings and events.

Plans to develop an additional opera house and new big hotel began as early as 1892. The *Park Record* reported: "As an evidence that the fame of Park City is spreading...during the past year...new buildings both for business and residence purposes have sprung up like mushrooms." The article claimed that the "big hotel and opera house will undoubtedly be built" during the coming summer.² Though plans did not originally proceed according to the *Record's* predicted timeline, interest in building the Grand Opera House emerged once more in early 1896 after the Park Opera House sustained fire damage.³ The Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) lodges of Park City took the initiative and plans to build the Grand Opera House were solidified.

By June 1896 the AOUW lodges had purchased a building site (approximately where Chimayo is located today) and a committee dedicated to the building's progress was formed.⁴ Work on the Grand Opera House was reported in the *Park Record* from January through May 1897. Finally, on May 8, 1897 the AOUW lodges held their first meeting in the Grand Opera House.⁵ The grand opening for shows occurred a little less than a year later on March 31, 1898. Thereafter, the *Park Record* advertised numerous shows and events that took place there. Meanwhile, the Park Opera House continued its business as usual just a few buildings up Main Street.⁶

The life of the Grand Opera House, however, was cut dramatically short on June 19, 1898. Fire swept down Main Street, burning most businesses to the ground, including the opera house, and causing over a million dollars in damages. Shortly after the fire, several groups schemed

¹ Park Record, 1889-01-12

² Park Record, 1892-01-16

³ Park Record, 1896-03-28

⁴ Park Record, 1896-06-20

⁵ Park Record, 1897-05-08

⁶ Park Record, 1898-04-30

ways to rebuild the Grand Opera House⁷, but even as the rest of the town was rebuilt, new opera house plans never materialized. Other theaters, such as the Dewey Theater (built on the current Egyptian Theater site), filled the entertainment void and the show went on.



Image ID: 2006.17.1

Photo Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Tuggle and Doppler Families

Caption: This stereoview by photographer T.E. Hinshaw, dated June 14, 1897, shows a crowd gathered outside the newly built Grand Opera House for Miner's Union Day. The *Park Record* remarked on the beautiful weather and "sweet music," then noted that the procession moved to the baseball grounds for "athletic exercises."⁸

⁷ Park Record, 1898-09-10 & 1898-07-09

⁸ Park Record, 1897-06-19