

# What's On in Melita This Week?

## Excerpts from one town's entertainment offerings

In the fall of 1917 a notice in the Melita New Era advised us that: "The Pull Bros. Co. 'Wizards of the North' appeared at the Opera House October 12th and 13th with their display of hypnotic and other interesting and bewildering performances."

Which leads us to the question; "An Opera House? In Melita?" We live in an era of unlimited entertainment. Our amusements are portable; we can watch and listen to almost anything on our phones. But in the old days presentations, recitations, plays and demonstrations required a place.

In 1913, to meet the needs of travelling shows, local concerts, and the latest thing...moving pictures, Melita businessman Robert Love built a new showcase for cultural activities. It featured a large stage and a sloped floor. It had a seating capacity of 400 and was furnished with opera chairs.

Up until that time Melita had been served by several venues. The Bell and Cosgrove Hall was opened in 1891, shortly after the establishment of the town. It was built on the site later occupied by the IOOF Hall, and then moved down the street to the site later associated

with Cornish's Lucky Dollar Store.

The large stone Sturgeon Block had a hall in the upper story. Mr. Brundrit's Hall was over Cameron and Duncan's Warehouse, where Cobb Motors later stood. Stokes Hall was also a busy venue.

So, what was happening in all these venues? Fortunately the Melita and Area history book has a record for us. Here is just a sample:

**1892:** A circus was billed for Melita for October 5<sup>th</sup>. A lecture on Astronomy by "Neptune" was given at Bell and Cosgrove Hall.

**1893:** The Fisk Jubilee Singers appeared at Bell Hall. They were billed as having a "world-wide reputation" and were touring the province.

**1899:** The Nelson Stock Company was slated at Stokes' Hall to perform "The Arabian Nights or a Prince of Liars."

Also at Stokes Hall, Professor Pull, hypnotist and mind reader, entertained a full house.

The Arian Swiss Bell Ringers were at Stokes' Hall November 2. The entertainment consisted of bell

ringers, guitar, banjo, dancing and singing. Also on the program: "views of Irish scenery, Oriental Pastimes and character impersonations."

**1900:** A "Grand Concert" featured Miss Edith I. Miller (Canada's greatest singer) who was assisted by Miss Jean Forsythe as pianist and Master Fred Alderson of Winnipeg, "celebrated boy violinist."

**1901:** The Stuttz New York Theatre Company played a two night engagement. "Crowded houses greeted the performers both nights."

**1902:** Miss E. Pauline Johnson and Mr. J. Walter McRaye drew a large house, "the former in her Indian recitation and the latter in his habitant dialect are inimitable."

**1903:** Sturgeon's Hall was the venue for "Miss Rose Adella Davidson, a "talented elocutionist from Colorado," who presented "Black Rock" in three acts.

**1905:** "The popular Irish Comedian, Tom Marks "will appear at Sturgeon's Hall. Most of his plays are written by himself."

**1908:** A four act comedy-drama was held in Sturgeon's Hall presented by Mr. Andrew Downie McPhee.

That's an impressive variety of entertainment!

Source:  
Melita - Arthur History Committee. Melita: Our First Century. Altona. Friesen Printers, 1983.



◀ The Melita Opera House.