

CITY HALL

(Continued from Page 1)

figure, and predicted that at this rate, the house would after a short time meet with indifferent patronage. ... Even in Columbus, a city well and favorably known to showmen, the price of the house ranges about \$30 ... Here in our own city the price of the Opera House is placed at \$50. Other costs make the entire rent for the use of the house for one night about \$62. These prices may answer for the balance of the present season, while the opera house is yet a new thing, but by the time another year rolls around, the present rent will be found to be away ahead of our city... The time will come... when managers will cut the town off their routes because they cannot afford to occupy our magnificent opera room."

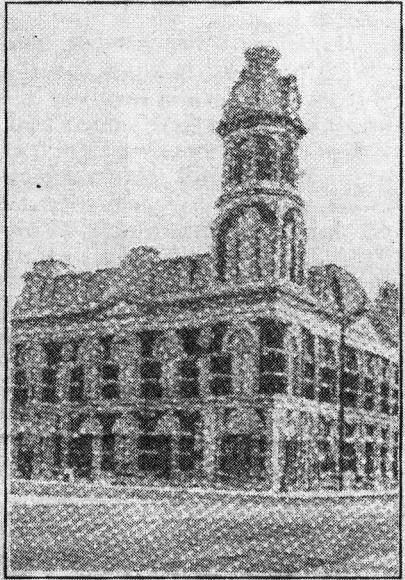
In June the Opera House was the site of the annual commencement exercises for the Delaware public schools. "The new opera house, the large graduating class (of 39 students), and the excellence of the program all combine to render everything perfect," *The Gazette* reported.

Hundreds of touring stage companies, lectures, concerts, and local productions were performed on the Opera House stage over the years. Thousands of residents visited the hall over the next five decades.

Motion pictures captured the entertainment fancy of local people after the turn of the century. Live productions were few and far between. By 1921, the Opera Hall, in need of major repairs, was closed. In 1929, Ohio Wesleyan University faculty and students recognized the need for the hall and the benefit it would be to the university's drama department. The group submitted remodeling plans and agreed to lease the house for 10 years. About \$20,000 went into the repairs, according to *Gazette* reports.

Delaware's Opera House, along with the rest of city hall, was destroyed by an early morning fire on Feb. 24, 1934.

"SPECTACULAR BLAZE RAZES CITY HALL," blared the headlines in the evening *Gazette*.



The former Delaware City Hall/Opera House at William and Sandusky streets.

The entire business district was threatened, as flames soared several hundred feet. "So rapidly did the flames sweep through the building that firemen directed their efforts to saving adjacent buildings," the reports said.

Earlier that morning, city firemen were called to an alarm at Zack Davis' seed store, at the current Brown Jug Restaurant location. Police Chief Pliickenbaum noticed the flames in city hall, and alerted firefighters of the more destructive blaze.

"The town clock on the top of the hall ... fell through the ruins of the building at 3:20 (a.m.)," *The Gazette* reported.

George Ebenhack, city hall's nightwatchman and janitor, was in the building when fire broke out. As he watched the blaze, Ebenhack said, "Well, I lost my overcoat, my lunch kit, and my job."

And Delaware lost its Opera House.

Editor's note — In addition numerous articles in The Delaware Gazette, information for this story also came from an unpublished manuscript written by former Ohio Wesleyan University student Patricia Flanigan, class of 1966, and information on file at the Delaware County Historical Society.