

## **Architectural Synthesis**

The architectural synthesis section of the report presents the architectural development of the Music Hall space from 1879 to present. Through the synthesis of the historical documentation and physical evidence gathered during on-site investigations, a series of three prominent phases of architectural development were devised. The first phase is the Music Hall era from 1879 to 1939. The second phase is the civic auditorium era from 1940 to c. 1969. The last phase is the period in which the auditorium was divided into partitioned office space.

### PHASE I

When the Market House/Music Hall building was constructed in 1879, the auditorium including the stage area comprised the entire second floor with the probable exception of a vestibule area at the top of the stairs. The Music Hall had three entrances according to Garey's 1881 History and Directory of Easton, one at the rear and two in the front by wide stairways. Photographic evidence suggests that the front entrances may have been through the north wall doorway near the northeast corner and the south wall doorway near the southeast corner (Illus. 2, 3). Fenestration of the east façade suggests that twin staircases may have climbed from the north and south corners and met at center on the second floor. One can only speculate about the stairs or the existence of second floor entrance rooms outside the hall. There is an inadequate archival record and no physical evidence exists since that portion of the building was razed during the 1940 renovation. Therefore, the arrangement of the staircase and the second floor configuration of the east section are unknown. Also located in the eastern section of the building were stairs leading from the second floor space to the third floor of the building. The third floor contained music practice rooms according to historian Dickson J. Preston in Talbot County: A History, and in Easton Album, Harrington cited material that stated the town offices were housed in the building. It is likely that the second floor stair also gave access to the gallery seating of the original Music Hall. No archival evidence was found that documented the interior area of the eastern end of the original 1879 building. Additionally, it can be deduced from photographic evidence and from looking at the floor plan of the existing building that the entire eastern section of the original 1879 Music Hall building (from the original east wall of the Music Hall auditorium to the original east exterior wall of the structure) was torn down for the construction of the 1940's Colonial Revival addition. Thus, any physical evidence of the original entrance, staircase, the rooms on the second floor, the second floor stair, and the original third floor practice rooms has been erased.

The original Music Hall seated 600 people and was configured as a rectangular, two-story space with its length running east to west. Half the seating was

comprised of chairs that could be easily removed to open the hall area in front of the stage for dancing or other events that required floor space (Illus. 13).

A gallery with tiered seating supported by columns was located at the back, or eastern end, of the Music Hall. Silhouettes in the wall plaster of the present third floor mechanical room indicate where the former raked floor for gallery seating on the balcony was located. The exact size, height and configuration of the gallery is not known. The existing third floor framing for the mechanical room is constructed of modern dimensioned lumber indicating that the entire gallery had been removed and new framing had been inserted. Existing empty joist pockets located at the third floor level in the west wall of the mechanical room (1940's brick wall) suggest that the gallery extended as far as the brick wall. When inserted, the brick wall may have replaced the columns that supported the west edge of the gallery. There is little conclusive physical evidence of the balcony's original depth remaining; recently, a new floor was installed as the space was converted into a mechanical room.

The east wall provided the primary public entrance into the second floor auditorium while the raised stage area occupied the western end of the space. Physical evidence combined with the analysis of historic photographs supports the presumption that the original east wall of the auditorium presently exists between the second floor offices near the elevator. This second floor wall aligns with the existing east wall of the third floor mechanical room above. The framing of the third floor wall and evidence of previous plaster on the east wall of the mechanical room suggest it was the end of the Music Hall space on the balcony (Illus. 24). The location of the original door(s) into the auditorium and to the gallery seating along the east wall is unknown.

The hall originally had five tall two-over-two windows on both the north and the south walls. Evidence for the height of the original windows is not only seen in historic photographs but also in physical evidence at the interior and exterior brick walls. Contemporary descriptions recorded that the Music Hall was also provided with four large gas chandeliers to illuminate the hall at night.

The Music Hall auditorium was elaborately decorated with polychromatic stencil patterns on the walls and on the ceiling (Illus. 18-20). Detailed descriptions of the stencil patterns, paint finishes and colors are in the attached conservator's report. Stencil patterns also formed medallions that encircled each of the pair of decorative metal ventilator grates in the ceiling (Illus. 25, 26). The walls had wainscoting that matched the front of the apron. Photographic evidence suggests that the wainscot was stained wood or painted a dark color (Illus. 12). Paint analysis indicates the original finish was painted a moderate brown with the exception of the top molding of the chair rail, which was grayish yellow. Exposed wooden trusses with chamfered edges and ornamented truss joints supported the high, vaulted ceiling (Illus. 21, 22). Paint analysis revealed that the trusses were originally moderate brown while the chamfers, bolt covers

and raised moldings were painted black. The decorative ends of the trusses were cut short at the walls to install the Forties ceiling. The original end brackets can still be seen penetrating through the ceilings of the adjacent offices (Illus. 23).

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1912 indicate that the Music Hall was heated with stoves. A 1908 Fowler drawing and early photographs show chimneys for two stoves on either side of the hall and two more chimneys for the stage and dressing room area (Figure 7 and Illus. 2, 3). Evidence in the exterior brick also indicates the locations of previously existing chimneys. Interior investigations and removal of a portion of the 1940 gypsum board wall confirmed the existents of stoves and revealed the location of stovepipe holes. The configuration of the stoves back stage and in the dressing rooms below had been changed several times during the Music Halls history.

The Music Hall was a proscenium house where performers stood on a raised platform stage in front of the audience. A large, plastered arch opening formed the proscenium dividing the stage area from the hall. The stage was typical of vaudeville theaters. With this type of stage actors primarily played on the apron and “down stage” close to the audience. The stage has no wings to store rolling scenery off stage, instead, it was constructed with a high fly loft above stage so that scenery flats, called flies, could be lowered to change the sets between acts. The 20x30 foot stage floor was steeply inclined toward the back or “up stage.” A false perspective could be created by lowering a series of flats painted in diminishing perspective to fill up stage toward a vanishing point at the center. The illusion of depth would be broken if an actor moved too far up stage.

A small trap door was centered at the back of the stage for special effects or to allow an actor to dramatically appear up stage during Music Hall productions. Two more small traps were positioned to the left and right halfway down stage. The traps were framed in between the stage floor joists. (Illus. 27) Constructed similar to batten doors, the traps’ boards were nailed across three heavy battens. The traps flipped open with a pull rope attached to the overhanging end of the center batten. One end of each side batten was semicircular cut on the up stage side to allow the trap to swing upward by pivoting on bolts that attached to the floor joists. (Illus. 28)

The stage was also equipped with foot lights set into the floor along the front edge of the apron (Illus. 29). Footlights are used sparingly today, primarily for dramatic effects, but before the advent of bright theatrical lighting that can throw light a great distance, footlights were needed both to get the light close enough to brightly light the performers and to supplement the head and side lights.

To either side of the raised stage area in the auditorium are two original doors. These doors open to landing areas connected to two half flights of stairs. One

half flight, winder stair ascends to the stage level. Evidence of previous risers in the existing wooden newel posts located to each side of the stage at the stairs proves that these staircases continued to wind around and rose up to the fly loft above the stage behind the proscenium arch (Illus. 32).

Natural light was gained back stage by two windows located in the south wall on stage and by the matching windows on the north side. The west wall, back stage, has one window that was centered above three stringcourse band windows that are equally spaced across the façade. All window-opening locations appear to be original but all original windows have been replaced.

Below the stage is a dressing room area. In his 1881 description, Garey noted that three private dressing rooms were below stage. The area is accessed by the two original flanking stage staircases located on the north and south walls. The existing stringcourse band windows illuminated the dressing room below stage along with two pairs of small square windows in the north and south walls.

After the Music Hall became a movie house in the Teens, the hall received a Style 20 Fotoplayer. The two-roll "Fotoplayer" player piano was equipped with a cabinet of organ pipes, percussion instruments and sound effects devices to accompany silent movies. A motorized pump and piping to provide the pneumatic pressure to run the Fotoplayer was installed in a small space below stage. An opening was cut through the front of the stage for the air supply pipe to reach the player, which was positioned in the hall on the right side of the stage. (Illus. 12) Modifications may have been made to provide a projection booth on the balcony, however, no documentation has been found and the physical evidence of the balcony has been almost completely obliterated by later renovations. The second interior painting campaign took place while the Music Hall served as a movie theater. Bronze powder finishes were used on the proscenium columns and a simple twentieth century stenciled border replaced the colorful nineteenth century ceiling stencil patterns (Illus. 31).

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show that by 1927, fire escapes had been added to the hall (Figure 4). Historic photos and current physical evidence indicates that two window openings on each side of the hall were cut down to form doors. The second and third windows from either side of the stage became fire exits that entered onto a shared metal fire escape landing. The landings had two sets of stairs, one on each side, so that every exit had its own stair. With the exception of these changes, the music hall remained in its original Phase I configuration with very few documented modifications until 1940.

## PHASE II

The second phase of the architectural evolution of the Music Hall occurred in 1940 when major renovations and an addition changed the building's use primarily to that of office and library space, and the style of the building was changed from Victorian Eclectic to Colonial Revival (Illus. 11). The Music Hall

space was reduced to about half its original size and reconfigured to serve as a civic auditorium. Renovation of the second floor hall itself did not begin until June 1940, after the movie equipment had all been removed from the space.

The tops of the tall window openings were infilled and the windows were replaced with shorter metal sash with divided lights. The “fireproof” replacement windows were described in contemporary reports. Several are still intact; one of the 1940 sashes can be seen today in the staircase to the mechanical room. The mismatched gray brick infill above the replaced windows in the hall is plainly visible (Illus. 33). The east wall of the hall was also partitioned with gray brick in 1940, cutting the former balcony out of the auditorium space (Illus. 34). We know that the gray brick dates from the Colonial Revival renovation because an April 1940 Star-Democrat report specifically mentions that the new construction used the distinctive brick color. A projection window was built into the new partition wall so that the former balcony area could serve as a projection room (Illus. 35). The entrance into the auditorium was centered in the partition wall. One informant, who sung in children’s recitals in the early fifties, recalls glass doors in the auditorium entrance.

During June 1940, the hipped roof above the stage was torn down and a new gable roof replaced it. The original hip roof ridge above the stage ran 90-degrees to the hall’s roof but the replacement gable roof continued the ridgeline of the hall roof. The 1908 Fowler drawing and early photographs indicate a small dormer window was located on the south side of the hipped roof above the stage. By removing the hipped roof and realigning the ridge, the space above stage for the fly loft was eliminated. The spiral staircase that accessed the fly loft and the flying system above the stage were also removed. Ironically, several flies for stage scenery were saved when the loft was demolished in 1940 and currently are trapped in the small attic above the stage.

Next, the high pitched roofs from the east end of the building were removed along with the entire third floor, the stairs, and extensive portions of the walls of the front massing of the original building. The remaining structure of the front portion was absorbed into the newly constructed Colonial Revival addition (Figure 5 and Illus. 9). The gable roof of the much broader new addition ran 90-degrees to the hall’s roof. The original roof tied into the new roof forming a rear ell. Some framing for the new roof structure penetrated into the former balcony space (Illus. 24).

The renovated building was heated by steam and the hall was fitted with steam radiators. The steam radiators were placed along the walls below each auditorium window. The chimney for the new steam boiler cut through the north west corner of the former balcony behind, or east, of the new brick partition wall. In recent years, the unused 1940 chimney had been cut down below the rafters so that it no longer penetrates through the roof. (Illus. 38)

A November 1943 article stated that the worn boards of the stage had been replaced. The auditorium apparently also received new floors according to an interview with L. Richard Carroll who, while in high school, worked for the painting contractor Avery Poole. Poole had painting contracts for the renovations in 1940. On-site investigations reveal that the present floor overlays an earlier tongue-and-groove floor.

The civic auditorium received new gypsum board walls that were furred over the Music Hall's plaster walls. The Twenties fire escape doors were infilled to become window openings again.

On-site investigations confirm that the wainscoting was pulled from the original walls and reapplied to the new walls. Since the depth of the hall was shortened during the renovations, ample undamaged material was available to reapply the wainscot.

The stage received a new lowered proscenium arch and the old high semicircular arch was replaced with a new flat arch (Illus. 36). The original proscenium arch was not removed, however, but was framed in above the civic auditorium's new lowered auditorium ceiling (Illus. 37). The lowered ceiling was in the form of an elliptic barrel vault with a step one third of the way to center (Illus. 34). Cove lighting running along the north and south walls illuminated the auditorium ceiling.

The new civic auditorium seated 200 to 300 people depending on what source is cited. In January 1941, the column "Under the Court House Dome" reported that the building inspectors would not permit more than 200 to occupy the space, but in May, a special supplement to the Sunday American stated that the auditorium seated 300.

The Colonial Revival colors were toned down from the elaborate schemes of the original 1879 stenciling. The paint scheme for the 1940 civic auditorium was basically monochromatic with some slight variations in pale muted off-white tones. The color of all walls and the proscenium of the civic auditorium were yellowish white. The crown molding was painted pale grayish yellow. The 1940 ceiling had been removed prior to this study but it is most probable that the ceiling was painted white.

### PHASE III

The Board of Education expanded their space to include the civic auditorium. However, the Board continued to use the auditorium for public meetings into the Sixties. Retired Superintendent Norman Moore recalled that the Board of Education put offices below the stage for a superintendent and several small workstations. Recent demolition plans show that the west side of the space below stage was partitioned into thirds. The southwest and center rooms were

offices and the northwest area had a bathroom. The east side was also divided in thirds with a small office space in the southeast and northeast corners. The center third along the east wall was left open providing easy access to the hatch located in the center of the stage apron. The hatch in the center of the stage apron was part of the original stage construction and allowed easy access for passing the hall's folded chairs in or out of storage below stage. Since the rooms below stage did not impinge upon the area for the pass-through hatch it is likely that the auditorium was still in use at the time of their construction.

Gelson Brooks, Operation Manager for the Board of Education and thirty-year veteran of the department, explained that there were never any architectural plans or schematic drawings filed for the renovation of the auditorium space. He believes that around 1970 county workers may have made a few quick sketch-plans but the offices were just informally built without any construction documents. With the exception of the demolition plans, neither the Board of Education nor the Talbot County Operations Center has records or drawings of the offices that subdivided the auditorium in the more recent years. The stage was converted into the finance office for the Board of Education, and the auditorium received an acoustic tile drop ceiling and partition walls to create additional offices. Physical evidence and the demolition plan show that the stage was partitioned at the proscenium wall and that stairs were cut into the front of the apron at center stage. When the stairs for the finance office were built the pass-through hatch in the apron was blocked. The finance offices on stage and the partitioning of the auditorium appear to have been part of the same renovation. Clearly, the space was no longer used as an auditorium. The auditorium had been partitioned into six offices; three on each side of a center aisle that aligned with the staircase that cut into the apron and led to a waiting area on center stage. Two offices were on the south side of the stage and one larger kitchen lunchroom was on the north side. All of the offices, partitions and drop ceilings, had already been removed prior to this study.