

THE RESTORATION OF VICTORIA HALL 1971 – 1983, HOW A CITIZENS GROUP SAVED AN ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE!

In 1970 the *Cobourg Opera and Drama Guild* were staging a production of the musical *Hello Dolly* in Victoria Hall's second-floor Concert Hall. During one of the performances a Guild member noticed that the floor was significantly bouncing. Alarmed by what he saw he went down to the courtroom, which was directly beneath the Concert Hall, and there was the central chandelier swaying uncontrollably, the performance was halted. Structural engineers were called in, Victoria Hall was deemed unsafe to occupy and thus began a 12-year restoration project to renovate Victoria Hall from top to bottom. The final cost was over \$7 million dollars which would be, given inflation, an equivalent cost today of more than \$45 million dollars!

The initial estimate just for structural repairs was \$1 million dollars and it was evident that the Town could not shoulder that expense so a motion to demolish the building was presented to Council. The one dissenting vote was Lenah Field Fisher who began "a call to arms" to save Victoria Hall. If it had not been for the efforts of a caring community and a group of activists who formed the *Society for the Restoration of Victoria Hall* the building would have become a casualty of the wrecking ball. On November 1, 1971 the Town offices moved out and the Restoration Society moved in. By 1983 the renovations were completed and Victoria Hall reopened its doors.

John Taylor, who was the Executive Director of the *Society for the Restoration of Victoria Hall* for four years, will speak about the wide-ranging rebuilding project and screen his short film *The Grand Gamble*. This event is being presented by Victoria Hall Volunteers on Tuesday September 18th at 7:00 pm in the Concert Hall, Victoria Hall, Cobourg. Doors open at 6:30, free admission, no reserved seating. We would like to thank the Town of Cobourg for their generous support that enabled this event to be held. For additional information call 905-342-2467.

By saving this 1860s architectural masterpiece there was a change in public thinking about historical conservation and people became aware of Victoria Hall's special past and the ongoing obligation to preserve it. The goal of the restoration was to revive the dignity and grandeur of Victoria Hall and it succeeded!