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The Griffin Opera House was located at the intersection of Church Street and Bridge Street East. In the background is the city hall clock tower.

## Music

# The centre of entertainment

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STORY BY BENZIE SANGMA FOR THE INTELLIGENCER

The Opera House was said to have been built on an incline to allow the occupants of approximately 1,300 seats in the auditorium and the galleries an undisturbed view of the stage, which measured 37 by 50 feet. In a flurry of activity and perhaps with more than a slight anxiety, the entertainment groups might have waited for their turn in the dressing rooms and a large hall located in the basement of the House.

Alternative to live entertainment available to the community, at the time, was the silent movies of the turn of the century. Post World War I American and Canadian audience went movie hero crazy over new screen idols like Clara Bow, Tom Mix, Charlie Chaplin and Rudolph Valentino.

By early 1920s, silent films became a new art form. These movies however did not threaten the existence of the opera houses with its menu of vigorous sights and sounds that could invoke a range of emotions in the audience. But then

came serious competition in the form of the Talkies when Al Jolson sang "My Mammy" in "The Jazz Singer", credited as the first full-

length feature 'talkie' film, in October 1927. These movies began to offer the audience the sense of closeness to the players seen on screen. Meanwhile, the silent movies began to die. Sound started to take over as the new reigning king of the movies as audiences wanted to hear tap-dancing, machine-gun bullets, and emotional outpouring of love from the lips of the silver screen's most beautiful and romantic couples.

The advent of the Talkies began to seriously affect the attendance at the opera houses everywhere and Belleville's own was no exception. Shows at the Griffin Opera House were soon struggling to attract audience. Eventually, it lost its audience and was finally forced to close its door in the late '20s and in the process, shutting down an important musical era of culture and entertainment in this region. The old brick building stood on the location for some more years before being reduced to rubble few years later.

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