

Seaforth History

The need for vast quantities of wood to fuel the fires needed to evaporate the salt brine was always a concern. In 1907, fire became a nemesis of another sort when a fire at the Coleman works brought the salt boom to a close.

The salt industry, added to the grain trade, meant economic boom-times for the village. On January 1, 1875, it became an incorporated town of 2,060 people and added 100 acres from McKillop and 50 acres from Tuckersmith to its area.

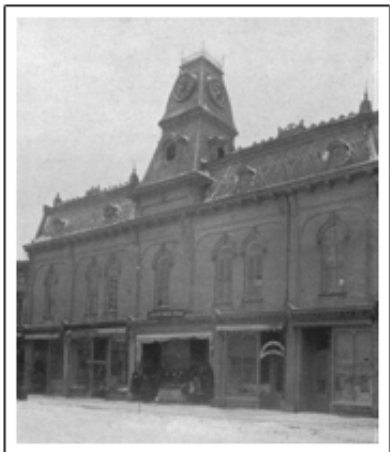
The Great Fire and Rise from the Ashes

The boom brought with it a problem that bedeviled many Ontario towns. Hastily constructed frame buildings, little fire fighting equipment and inadequate water supplies were a recipe for disaster. In September 1875, fire broke out in a business operated by a Mrs. Griffith and before it was done 12 acres of the business district were a smoldering ruin. In all, 22 businesses and 9 residences fell victim to the flames.



The total loss was estimated at more than \$100,000 of which approximately a third was covered by insurance. Interestingly, Mrs. Griffith had recently taken out more than sufficient insurance and although no official cause was recorded suspicion abounded that the blaze was the result of an insurance policy rubbing against the rent. Mrs. Belle Campbell, for many years Seaforth's unofficial historian,

indicated that locals were ready to tar and feather Mrs. Griffiths on her return from the Goderich court after an unsuccessful attempt to convict her of arson. The lady apparently thought better of returning to live in Seaforth and disappeared from the town's history for good.



The community's economic strength proved sufficient to rebuild the downtown. Within two years, Main Street was lined with many of the brick structures still in use today. Beginning in 1977, Seaforth residents and businesses had many of these structures and local residences designated

under The Ontario Heritage Act. The downtown core was designated a Heritage Conservation District in 1984. These actions preserved the spectacular Victorian buildings for future generations to admire.

One of the most interesting buildings in the downtown area is the Cardno Block finished in 1877 for Alex Cardno, a Scottish immigrant who arrived in Canada in 1852. Dominated by the tower containing a four-faced clock, the building originally contained five stores at street level above which was the Cardno Music and Concert Hall. When built the structure cost \$30,000, and the purchase and installation of the clock added another \$2,000.

For years, the hall was the leading centre for the arts in Seaforth featuring everything from minstrel shows to local entertainers. In the 1920's, the Murless Players held forth under the direction of Mrs. Murless Jones. The First World War saw several patriotic 'Victory' concerts. Several of these were led by Grace McFall (banker James G. Mullen's wife) whose voice had been acclaimed in New York when she sang with the Frances Wilson Opera Company at the turn of the century.



Seaforth's musical traditions are deeply rooted with a number of bands past and present playing significant roles in the area's cultural life.

In 1862, a voluntary infantry company was established called No 3 Company, 33rd Battalion. This organization existed until the First World War and featured its own marching band made up of men and boys from the community. During the war, many members served with the 161st Battalion Band.

In 1924, a more famous band came into existence when the citizens' band purchased used McKenzie-Seaforth tartan military kilts and proclaimed themselves the Seaforth Highlanders. This organization was active until the 1960s when they amalgamated with the Dashwood band.





The now closed Seaforth District Collegiate Institute has in recent years produced award winning brass bands. Originally containing both boys and girls, the band has become an all girls band. In 2004, it was asked to lead an opening parade at Disney World in Florida. The band has performed regularly in parades around Ontario and has also journeyed to Europe.

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