

Remembering the Forester's Community Hall

Echoes From the Past – Essay #9



Many rural communities in Nova Scotia have traditionally used community halls as their center of social life. Such was the role that the Forester's Community Hall played in Hammonds Plains. The hall held a dear spot in the hearts of residents, serving the community admirably in times of celebration and peril for 50+ years during the 1900's.

The community hall was built in 1912 by the Hammonds Plains chapter of the Independent Order of Foresters. It was a large two story building, with a concert hall and stage on the first floor and large banquet room with a kitchen on the top floor. The hall was located on the left side of the front entrance to where the current Station 50 Fire Department sits today.

During the next 50+ years it held a multitude of community events that formed the basis of the social fabric of Hammonds Plains. Events such as: dances, 45s card games, concerts, movies (B grade westerns were very popular during the 1940s), community suppers, community meetings, the Labour Day Picnic and Bingo games dominated the use of the hall. The Legendary Hank Snow even played at the hall on a semi regular basis before he became famous as a country music star. The hall also served as a school for a few years in the 1950's when the community school across the road became over crowded.

One of the more fascinating but yet popular events held at the center was the Box Social. The Box Social was a gathering where the young ladies of the community would decorate a basket and include enough food for a lunch for two in the basket. Baskets would then be auctioned off to the highest bidder at the box social and the highest bidder and the owner of the basket would then have a picnic together. There are many stories of local men trying to find out who made the baskets ahead of time so they would know which baskets to bid on. Sometimes the competitive nature got out of hand as bids were purposely driven up so someone's dating partner had to bid a high price to get the basket of their choice.

The community suppers held at the hall were renowned in Hammonds Plains and folks came from all areas of the Halifax region to attend. However, one had to be careful not to sneak along the exterior back of the hall during the suppers as the dish washers use to just open the back window on the top floor and throw the dish water out and if they were in a hurry they sometimes didn't check ahead of the time to see who was below.

The hall was used as a community gathering spot until the late 1960's, bringing an end to an era where community social events were a prime source of entertainment for so many of the residents of Hammonds Plains.



The Forester's Community Hall – 1950's