

## Aylmer Heritage Series

# OLD TOWN HALL

Visit the Old Town Hall and admire the original Italianate architectural design, arcaded brickwork, boldy-modelled cornice, and the beautiful Florentine windows. Sit in the Opera house where famous poetess Pauline Johnson once graced the stage in the 1880's or where Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald addressed the residents of Aylmer.



### Town of Aylmer

46 Talbot Street West, Aylmer Ontario N5H 1J7  
t: 519.773.3164 | [www.aylmer.ca](http://www.aylmer.ca)

### Aylmer Heritage Committee

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## TIMELINE

- 1873 Taxpayers vote 63 to 37 to proceed with plans for a hall
- 1873 Village council choose George Watson and Son of London as the architects, John H Arkell as the contractor and Harrison Maw as the construction inspector
- 1874 Old Town Hall was completed
- 1880 Grand Start Concert was given by Erin's Prima Donna
- 1886 Sir John A. MacDonald arrived in Aylmer and spoke at the Old Town Hall
- 1892 Pauline Johnston (famous Canadian poetess) performed until 1895
- 1898 Union Jack was painted on the ceiling, remains there today
- 1911 Office Addition was built across the front
- 1911 Second Floor was rebuilt added a large stage and two galleries
- 1914 Aylmer Minstrel Show performed here until 1950
- 1917 Sir Adam Beck Chairman of the Hydro Electric Commission of Ontario
- 1950 Opera House (second floor) closes
- 1980 Aylmer Old Town Hall houses Library and approved for restoration
- 1980 Designated a heritage structure
- 1988 Restorations complete and open to the public

## RENTALS

Host your next special event at the Opera House inside the Old Town Hall! It's the perfect location for a company party, wedding ceremony, a special anniversary, or a milestone birthday dinner.

### Old Town Hall Capacity

- Capacity Total – 180 people
- Main floor – 85
- Balcony 95

### Old Town Hall Amenities

- Elevator Access
- Large Projection Screen
- Kiawa Piano
- Microphone
- Refreshment Counter
- Dressing Rooms for theatrical performances
- Small Kitchen (with fridge and stove)

### Additional Information

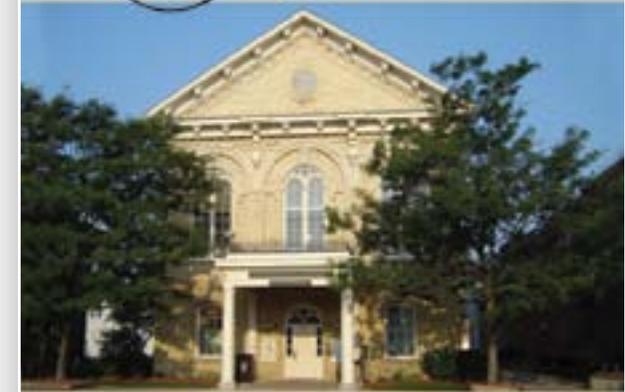
- Can be fully licensed
- Table and chair set up is available
- In-house light and sound technicians available

### To Book the Old Town Hall

For more information or to book the Old Town Hall for your special event, please call 519-773-3164.

## Aylmer Heritage Series

# OLD TOWN HALL IN Aylmer



### Aylmer Old Town Hall

*As it looks today after being fully renovated in the 1980's*



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# THE HISTORY

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This beautiful building is an example of the best mid-Victorian Opera Houses and is the epitome of the proud civic building of its day, and an excellent representation of a Heritage Building in Ontario.\*

In 1873, passionate residents of Aylmer voted to proceed with the plans for a New Village Hall and raised enough money for the purchase of the market grounds, market building, and the “New Village Hall”. Village council chose architects George Watson and Son of London, Contractor John H Arkell, and Construction Inspector Harrison Maw to create the magnificent building we still see today.

As the Aylmer Council began to discuss the fate of our dear Old Town Hall in 1978, the citizen’s group, Heritage Aylmer was born. Although it was a long up-hill struggle for preservations, the determination of this group and a few municipal councilors, finally got permission for extensive renovations. The Old Town Hall was designated a heritage structure under the Ontario Heritage Act in 1980, protecting it from alteration or demolition. Extensive renovations began and continued throughout the 1980’s restoring it back to it’s original Italianate architectural design, arcaded brickwork, boldy-modelled cornice, with beautiful Florentine windows. Doors re-opened to the public in 1988, with the final touch complete, the original Union Jack on the ceiling of the Opera House as it was in 1873.

The Old Town Hall was and is the home to the Opera House; stage to many famous people and entertainers from: Poetess

Pauline Johnson in 1882, and Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A, MacDonald in 1886. It’s also been the home to the Post Office, Council Room, Dance Hall, Fire Hall, Public Works Department.



**Prime Minister - Sir John A. MacDonald**

This beautiful piece of history is cherished and treasured within the Town of Aylmer and neighbouring communities. It is the current home of the Aylmer Library on the main floor, and the Opera House on the upper floor host to plays by The Aylmer Community Theatre, and performances hosted by The Aylmer Performing Arts, including Canadian Jazz and Famous tenor, Moe Koffman, John McDermott, and Royal Wood.

Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald spoke at the Old Town hall before his election on December 14th, 1886.

\*As quoted from consulting restoration architect Peter John Stokes

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# PERFORMERS

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The Opera house on the second floor of this building, held concerts, minstrel shows, plays, and was the focal point for church services, meetings, and lectures. This beautifully restored building was also once stage to many famous people throughout history. Local talent was plentiful and organizations performed their own Opera House concerts, but entertainment from outside the Aylmer area was surprisingly numerous considering the town’s size.



**Entertainer Rosa d’Erina**

Ireland’s well known entertainer Rosa d’Erina, performed her “Grand Star” concert on October 1, 1880 as part of her world tour. Much of what could be learned about Rosa, was found in letters from her manager and from herself, to the Town of Aylmer. It was in one of these letters that she made her reputation clear to the town by means of an advertisement for a previous concert which included reviews of praise by the

Princess of Wales, President and Mrs. Grant, Lord Dufferin, and the Governor General of Canada. She offered locals a discount “My usual tours are \$50, but I will accept \$30”.

The most famous performer to appear at the Old Town Hall was the Canadian poetess Pauline Johnson. With an English mother and a Mohawk Indian father, she made an enormous



**Famous Poetess Pauline Johnson**

contribution to Canadian life through her role as “the voice of the Indian race and English tongue”. Pauline captivated audiences reciting her own work, wearing the appreciated and celebrated Indian costumes from 1892 to 1895.

Aylmer Minstrel Show was a touring entertainment group composed of local talent which performed in front of packed theaters from 1914 to early 1950 at the Opera House and neighbouring communities. The Minstrels were so popular, that people would sleep outside overnight for tickets. In 1925, the Aylmer Boys’ Band was very popular, satisfying their audiences when they performed a Spring Concert in May, and an Anniversary concert in December until 1947.