



## Grand Old Opry Uvalde Style

by Linda Koehl

The Grand Opera House is a historical theater in Uvalde. Built in 1891, it is the oldest functioning opera house in the state of Texas. It has become a premiere arts venue for plays, musicals, and cultural performances

The Opera House was built by a partnership formed between local businessmen, merchants and ranchers called the Uvalde Real Estate and Building Company. Concerned about the gunfights and general rough atmosphere in the town, Uvalde's forefathers decided to bring culture in the form of a Grand Opera House to the downtown area for the purpose of changing the environment there.

The beautiful 3-story brick structure has Richardsonian Romanesque elements in its architecture. In the typical Texas opera house style of the period, the building has the auditorium above commercial spaces on the first floor. At the turn of the century, there were also fashionable offices on the second floor. The Opera House was an immediate success and became the social center of Uvalde and quite well known throughout the region.

In 1900, the building was sold to Fred Locke and then to the John Nance Garner family in 1916. By the early 1940s, most of the office tenants had moved out, and the building went through a period of decline. In July, 1978, the dilapidated property, now owned by the descendants of Garner, was donated to the City of Uvalde., who restored it to its 1890 condition. It

has hosted many talented musicians and actors. Acoustics in the Opera House are near perfect, and for that reason, entertainers (especially singers) clamor to perform there.



According to managers and maintenance workers, no one is ever alone in the opera house. There are many accounts of ghostly activity, including chair seats that flip up and down at will, tap dancing on the stage, children's running footsteps, and the elevator moving unbidden from floor to floor. Apparitions have appeared in the second story windows and one such spirit was displayed so clearly that several police burst into the building, combing it for intruders. However, the spirits are friendly and seem happiest when there is lots of activity.

The Grand Opera House Advisory Board welcomes and encourages talent of all kinds to perform in this very special venue.

If you are interested, please call Advisory Board President Linda Koehl at 830-591-4430.