

Tillman County Chronicles

Tillman County Historical Society Column

by Joe Wynn

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Tillman County sending young men off to training for World War I (Community Auditorium, background).

Community Auditorium was important to early Frederick

When the City of Frederick was organized in 1902, the early residents set about building churches, schools, and businesses – facilities that would enhance the quality of civic life and commerce in the new city.

By 1916, the city boasted five churches (two of which had impressive brick structures), four brick school buildings, three banks, three motion picture theatres, a new Carnegie library, a three-story city hall, and a fully developed brick downtown business area with concrete sidewalks. Frederick was a town on the grow!

Because civic life was recognized as a need for the thriving community, city fathers made an early commitment to construct a

community auditorium.

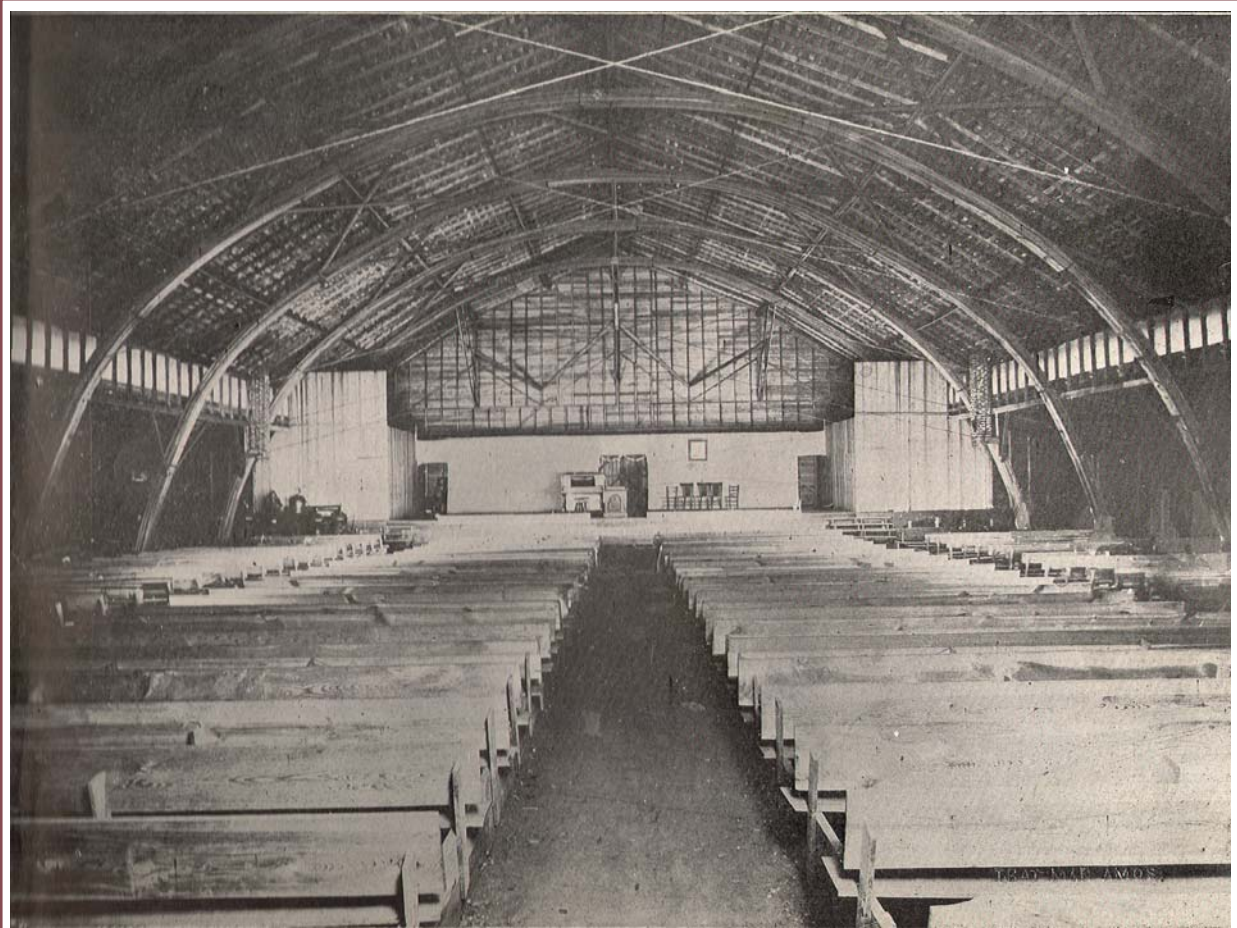
The auditorium, a massive wooden barn-like building, was built in 1916 and was located at 12th and Dahlia, on the exact location where the Central Grade Auditorium/Middle School Gymnasium now stand.

The front of the auditorium faced to the west, directly into Dahlia.

A 1920 publication titled “Frederick, the Miracle City” described the auditorium.

“A unique feature of civic life of the city is its Community Auditorium, a large frame structure covering almost one-fourth of a block, located at East Dahlia Avenue and

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Interior, Frederick Community Auditorium (circa 1920)

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Twelfth Street. This building was built in 1916 through the efforts and donations of the people of the city, and admirably fills the need of a meeting place for unusually large assemblies. During the war (World War I) it was the gathering place for big meetings in the bond drives and other war work, and is used for all purposes from public speakings to county fairs, poultry shows, and similar events.”

“A pleasing feature in connection with the Community Auditorium building is a small park adjoining, making a beauty spot almost in the heart of the city.”

The auditorium itself was a massive room with wooden plank benches and a dirt floor.

Behind the auditorium, to the east, was

an attached wood-floored gymnasium that was used by students at the nearby Frederick High School (an early brick building that was located at the site of today’s Frederick Middle School).

Builder of the Community Auditorium in 1916 was A.H. Krause, the contractor who constructed most of the brick buildings in downtown Frederick and surrounding communities.

The Community Auditorium was an impressive investment in the civic life of the developing city, but it only stood for about five years.

In 1922, construction began on a modern, new Frederick High School, complete with a first-class school auditorium and gymnasium.

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WW I war bond rally in front of Frederick's Community Auditorium, circa 1917

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The Community Auditorium was cleared to make way for the new school, to be built at the exact site where the auditorium had been located.

In 1920, the city had purchased a 39-acre track for a new fairground, race track, and municipal park at the southwest edge of the city. Cost of the land was \$10,000.

The wooden Community Auditorium was removed, although there is some indication that part of the building was taken to the new fairgrounds site.

Much of the building was recycled, though, into some of the many construction projects that were underway in Frederick.

It is believed that in 1924, some wood from the Community Auditorium building was used in construction of the St. Paul AME Church which is now located at the Pioneer Townsite Museum.

The modern new school, auditorium and gym that replaced the Community Auditorium was completed in 1923 and used as Frederick High School until 1950 when it became Central Grade School. It was used as Central Grade until 1997 when

Frederick's upper elementary grades moved to the current Frederick Elementary School on North 15th Street. The 1923 gymnasium is still used by Frederick Middle School.

The Tillman County Historical Society has several fascinating panorama pictures of the Community Auditorium on display at the Pioneer Townsite Museum. The pictures show WW I bond rallies and Tillman County troops departing for service in the war. They can be seen any weekday from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at the museum. Admission is free.

Joe Wynn is a member of the Tillman County Historical Society Board of Directors.