

## BARTER THEATRE...Buildings

The Barter Theatre building was constructed in 1831 as a new location for Sinking Springs Presbyterian Church. The original design of the structure was rectangular with six steps across the entire width of the front, leading to a portico with large white columns, topped with steeple and spire which reflected the classical influence of the period because it was situated on a sloping lot that had a basement that was built into the back of the building. In 1937, the building became the property of the "Sons of Temperance" that hosted performances and social events, as the facility became known as the "Temperance Hall." The earliest theatrical event known to occur here was a production of *The Virginian* on January 14, 1876, the proceeds of which were used for building repairs. In 1890, the Sons of Temperance transferred the building's title to the Town of Abingdon, to be used as a town hall for the benefit of the citizenry. The town made improvements, enclosing the back porch to provide two levels of offices and rooms. The words "Town Hall" were etched into rock and placed into the brick on the façade added to the building. In addition to offices, the town used the building as a fire hall – hence the fire alarm on the roof that sounded as needed at any time, day or night. When the fire siren sounded during a Barter performance, the actors were instructed to freeze their position on stage and to resume the action when the alarm concluded. The alarm remained on the building until 1994 when the fire department went to a system of electronic communications to alert fire fighters. Many of the interior furnishings in the theatre are from the Empire Theatre. Robert Porterfield learned that this New York City theatre, constructed in 1875, was slated for destruction. Porterfield had one weekend in which to carry away furnishings and equipment for use at Barter. He organized a volunteer crew and came away with \$75,000 worth of properties, including seats, lighting fixtures, carpeting, paintings in large gold frames, and red wall tapestries. The lighting system at the Empire, designed and installed by Thomas Edison, was used at Barter Theatre through the mid 1970's. Portraits from the Empire include: Dennis King in the Empire's *The Three Musketeers*, Maude Adams, the original Peter Pan and the large portrait of Katherine Cornell was a set decoration at the Empire.

At the urging of Artistic Director Richard Rose, the Barter Foundation Board of Trustees approved a plan to renovate the Barter building in April 1995. Architects Harry McKinney and Peyton Boyd of Abingdon designed the renovation and addition. The project was awarded to BurWil Construction, Inc. of Bristol. Barter Trustees Captain Cornell Angelman and Howard McElroy and Barter staff Richard Rose and Hazel Youngs served on a Building Committee to oversee the project on behalf of the theatre. Special features of the renovated building include four sculptures holding lighting fixtures from the Empire Theatre on the right and left walls of the auditorium and starbursts on the ceiling from which the chandeliers hang.

Barter Theatre Stage II was constructed in 1829, as a Methodist church and later became a part of the Stonewall Jackson Female Institute, as a Chapter House for the school's literary societies. The only main building of the school which was not destroyed by fire in 1914; it was later used by the Martha Washington College as a gymnasium and a storage area. In 1961, the building was renovated by Barter Theatre as a small theatre, with major improvements made in 1973 and again in 1985, when additions included a lobby and the Jessie Belle DuPont Memorial Theatre Garden.

In 2003, BurWil Construction oversaw architectural plans designed by Uwe Rothe of Cain Rash West Architectural Services. Renovations included new plush seating for 167 patrons

and the addition of a café. The Café at Barter Stage II now serves actors, patrons and community members specialty sandwiches, desserts and coffees. Most all of the furnishings and décor was either used in a Barter production or to advertise a Barter production. Historic pictures of the theatre also adorn the walls.

In 2004, Barter Stage II was given a more finished and refined look with the addition of sconce lighting and pilasters. Barter Stage II is favored by actors and audiences for its intimate, thrust stage seating, while those who prefer a more elegant setting choose Main Stage.