

The Arts Council is continually trying to restore and repair the building. The fall of 97 and the Spring of 98 brought about the installation of the elevator and the refurbishment of most of the public areas. In 99 the Tin Ceiling was added to the Fire Hall. New metal roofing was put on the slanted roof area in 2002 and was replaced in 2009 following the infamous hail storm of 2007. The gallery also received a new track system in 2009 and the Watson Room underwent upgrades in 2010 as well as new front doors and revitalization of the entryway. There are many plans for work in the future, but of course lack of funds are always a problem. Currently the DDAAC is in the process of adding air conditioning to the upper auditorium as well as replacement of the rear entrance staircase to the Art Group and Pottery rooms. Other future projects include enlargement and refurbishment of the main level washrooms to make them accessible for wheelchairs, a refurbished upper kitchen, and an improved sound system for the auditorium.



Watson Arts Centre History and Information

Is a Provincially and Municipally declared Heritage site.

Built in 1905, the building originally housed City Hall, (council chamber, general office, engineers department), Reading Room, Fire Department, Police headquarters and jail. Over the years it has also housed the Library, The Ukrainian Cultural Association, Jack & Jill nursery school, Public Washrooms, the home of the Town band as well as many other uses. The second floor has always served as a public auditorium used for plays, dinners, dances and meetings. The Dauphin and District Allied Arts Council took over the management of the building in the early 70s when demolition of the building was threatened. The Council, organized by Dr. Vernon L. Watson lobbied the town, and the group was able to take over its management. The Centre is financed by Manitoba C.H & T, City of Dauphin, rental income, memberships and various fundraising programs through the year.

Originally called the Allied Arts Centre, it was renamed after the founder of the Council, Dr. Vernon Watson, a local dentist, musician and artist who died in 1984. This has since been shortened to Watson Art Centre. The Mandate of the Arts Council is to promote and support the Arts in Dauphin and Area through on going programs in visual and performing arts and Arts related activities, classes and workshops. The board run Arts Council works hard at producing a range of entertainment, arts classes and activities for Dauphin's public each year, employing a part time administrator and part time caretaker in order to do so.

The Town Hall construction was started in 1904 and completed in 1905 after a fire burned down the original one early in 1904. Its design and construction was done by Dauphin architect, building contractor, RM Reeve, & lumber yard manager, Stuart Geekie. All local materials were used. The main frame of the building is Wood with a rock/cement foundation and brick facade.

All of the ceilings on both floors would have been the pressed tin, except for the fire hall area. Many on the lower level have been removed, or covered up. In restoration of the building, tin tiles have been replaced in the Main Lobby and the Fire Hall area. The Watson Room still has the original ceiling, as does the Auditorium. The radiators are original, however, the building was at first heated through steam pipes by the Town steam Plant located where Manitoba Hydro was at the end of the block.



Genotaph and Town Hall, Dauphin, Manitoba.—12.

When that was discontinued, the boiler room and system were added to the rear of the building with the boiler being salvaged when they closed the Train station across the street. It dates to 1956 and was in use until 2007, when thanks to the generous donations, community and City of Dauphin support and fundraising activities of the Council a new boiler system was installed.

The Watson Art Centre has survived two fires, one in 1917, and one in 1948. Signs of fire (charred timbers) can still be seen in the Attic.

The Upper Fire Hall - originally was the offices of the Police Station. When pulling up the floor during restoration, we had to remove some concrete that would have been floor to the jail. This concrete extends into the room that is now the Janitors work area. In the 1940's The Children's Library and sometime later the Public Health Nurse were also located in this area.

The Lower Fire Hall - This area is somewhat different than when the building was built. There were originally 2 large doors and bays for the wagons and then the fire engines. On the left side of the fire hall area was the office area and sleeping quarters. Sometime over the years the two doors were extended for longer fire equipment. The horses for the fire wagons were housed in various stables around town. When the alarm went off, the first ones at the Fire Station were the ones used and paid.

Sometime in the time frame of the 30s to the 50s the outer wall was extended further and a third bay was added, removing the office and sleeping quarters. This meant removing two windows and a door to allow the space to accommodate motorized fire Trucks. When the Fire Dept. moved into their new space on the next block, these large doors were removed and bricked in.

The fire hall space was used by the Ukrainian Cultural Association for several years after the Arts Council took over the building and has been used by the Ukrainian Festival and Elections Canada in the past as well. Most of the time it is used by the Arts Council as classroom for art classes and more recently home to the Old Fire Hall Shows, Spoken Word events, children's summer art program and various youth concerts.

Watson Room - was the main Town office area, with wickets into what is now the Hall/ Gallery area. Now it serves as a meeting and board room.

The Gallery - The doors and walls at either end of the Gallery were not original and have been added at a date after construction. The configuration of the rear hallway and the back area are probably quite different now than when the building was built. It is hard to know exactly what some areas of the building were like originally, as poor records have been kept over the years. The Gallery houses a number of quality local and touring art exhibits every year and showcases local artisans work through our Made In The Parkland gift shop area.

Ballet Room - Was called the gold room at some earlier date, and may have housed offices, during its life as town hall, or may have been the council chambers. Now it is used as a Dance Studio and for meetings as well as a dressing area for performers in both the main auditorium and Old Fire Hall.

Main floor bathrooms - were one room, and for a long period of time was where the Town band used to practice.

The Arts Council Office - was the Mayors office, and had a stairway to the basement, that gave access to the Vault (which now houses the Elevator Machine room), and a Private washroom. The Stairway was closed up after the Council took over, and a second outside door was added to the Vault. The office was made smaller by the addition of the elevator when it was added.

The Auditorium - Still has many of the original features including the pressed ceilings, balcony, and hardwood floors and woodwork. Of course the electric lights were added at a later date. As were the Theatre lights and sound system. The mirrored ball was donated by a dance group that was active in Dauphin for a while. The balcony used to sit 110, but now sits 106. The circular staircase was donated by the Lionettes, and came from Winnipeg. It replaced a ladder like stair. The staircase is necessary to allow two ways off of the balcony in case of a fire. The glass along the front of the balcony was also added for safety as well, due to the low level of the balcony rail.

There was a Boxing ring located on the stage for a while in the 1940's. The 2nd level kitchen was originally located behind stage right, and the present kitchen housed bathrooms. A built in bar added since 1970 was removed to allow the addition of the elevator.

Basement - Has housed a number of things over the years. The Theatre Amisk Storage room was various things including the Cubs & Scouts meeting rooms, and police station. There was a large shower room off of the main room, traces of which can still be seen.

The Vault - Used by the town, was accessed through a stairway from the Mayor's office into the basement, and with the addition of the 2nd outer door, was used as storage. Now, a major portion of the 2 foot thick walled structure houses the Elevator machine room.

The Pottery & Art Rooms - Have been used by these two user groups (pottery club and Art Group since the Arts Council took over the building. Information is scattered as to their uses prior to that. They were however, used as a Ladies Public washroom facilities for many years in the late 40s and early 50s'.