

Ramsdell Theatre
101 Maple Street
Manistee, MI 49660

231.398.9770



Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, The Ramsdell has served the Michigan coastal community of Manistee for over a 100 years. Built in 1903 by local lawyer and philanthropist Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, the Theatre and Grand Ballroom were designed by re-known Chicago architect Solon Spencer Beman. The Theatre was comparable to the best opera and vaudeville houses at the time of its construction and though extensively renovated over the years, retains much of its original architecture and charm.

Rent the Ramsdell

The Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center is comprised of several distinct areas totaling 45,560 sq. ft.), each of which can be used for different purposes. For more information, current rates and availability please contact Executive Director Xavier Verna at (231) 398-9770 or via email at xverna@RamsdellTheatre.org

Rotary Grand Ballroom

The Rotary Grand Ballroom is one of the most elegant facilities in northwest Michigan. With a seated capacity of 300, it is perfect for that once in a lifetime wedding reception or anniversary party. The kitchen includes warmers, coolers and a freezer; newer tables and chairs make the ballroom a perfect choice for your event. The dimensions of the hall seating area are 50' x 75'. The ballroom is accessible by an elevator from the first and second floors (65" x 52" - 35" door).



Theatre

The theatre is a turn of the century design and is one of the best small town theatres in the country. Lovingly restored over the last decade, the theatre seats over 400 and is ready for your performance or production. Modern light, sound and naturally good acoustics make this a perfect venue for your event. The proscenium is 26' wide x 26' high; the stage is 38' deep with just over 15' of wing space stage left and right.



Hardy Hall

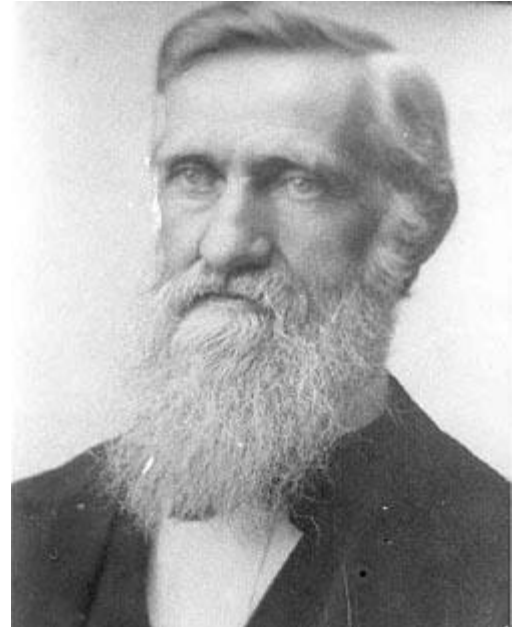
Home to the permanent collection of the Manistee Art Institute, Hardy Hall is a smaller, more intimate venue for graduation parties or small group events. Seating 100, you can enjoy the beautiful surroundings and woodwork for your event. The dimensions of the hall are 35' x 50'



History

The Ramsdell Theatre and Hall

On September 4th, the Ramsdell Theatre opened to a standing-room-only audience to view the acclaimed production of “A Chinese Honeymoon” by the traveling New York Casino Company. It opened to rave reviews and began the 87-year history of community operations and usage that has survived both world wars, the decline and rebirth of a historical downtown and the advent of home videos. This facility has always been and always will be a community-oriented operation and that perhaps is what keeps the hope, spirit and vitality on its current path.



Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell

The public spirit and generosity of its benefactor, Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, are well outlined in the history of Manistee. This well-to-do lawyer worked for the cultural and economic improvement of this small community in northwest Michigan. He helped build the first bridge across the river, he opened the first hardware store in Manistee, he was instrumental in establishing the first newspaper, he helped to found the First National Bank and he established the Manistee Water Works. He invested in real estate and when the Scandinavian Opera House burned, he invested over \$100,000 to create an architectural and cultural landmark that is still standing today – The Ramsdell Theatre and Hall.

Construction

Almost two years earlier, in 1901, construction had begun on the building at the corner of First and Maple streets. Mr. S. Beman, a prominent Chicago architect, was contracted to design and build this community cultural center which not only included a theatre but also incorporated an assembly hall as well. (The theatre and hall are separated by a solid wall of masonry making the buildings absolutely distinct from each other.) The exterior is of red brick with six large columns supporting the portico over the main entrance to the theatre on Maple Street – a very classic Colonial design.

The Hall

The hall portion of the structure was completed first. The first floor was devoted to parlors, a drawing room, a cloak room and a kitchen. The second floor was devoted entirely to a dance hall with an orchestra balcony and fireplace. The Manistee Retail Clerk’s Union christened it with a ball on December 12, 1902. The official opening was held six days later with a ball held by the Ramsdell family.

Theatre Stage

As 1902 came to a close, work on the theatre was still progressing. It was to be constructed and equipped so that the best traveling companies in the country could be obtained. The footage of the stage and backstage areas was comparable to the best opera and vaudeville houses in the country. Today, the stage measures 34 feet deep and 60 feet wide. The gilded proscenium arch is 26 feet wide. The gridiron is 70 feet above the stage while the two fly galleries are almost 30 feet about the stage.

There is a paint gallery that is 34 feet above the stage floor and enables artists to paint scenery cloths while viewing them vertically. The stage floor is graced with nine trapdoor platforms, six of these can be raised and the other three can only be lowered into the basement.

Theatre Features

The most striking feature of the green and gold interior is the horseshoe balcony supported by numerous pillars that extend to the tin-plated ceiling. The interior decoration was completed by some very famous artists in their own right. Walter Wilcox Burrige, a renowned scenic painter (who did the original “Wizard of Oz” scenery), painted the front drop curtain, entitled “A Grove Near Athens.” Frederic Winthrop Ramsdell, Ramsdell’s son, painted the two lunettes in the lobby and the lavish dome in the house, depicting Venus riding her chariot through the heavens, surrounded by cherubs. The original seating capacity was 1,200, including the gallery seating, which was reserved for Manistee’s lower and laboring classes. (The gallery is no longer in use due to fire safety rules.) Today, the house seats close to 600, which includes four boxes, two on each side of the stage and two loges in the lower balcony.

