

Park Opera House

Prior to 1884, the theatricals that came to the city gave their performances in different halls, principally in Metropolitan Hall on East Bay Street. The demand for a regular theatre had been growing for some time, when, in 1883, plans were made by local citizens for building one. The lot at the southeast corner of Laura and Duval Streets was procured by lease from William Astor, of New York, and the erection of the theatre was begun. It was a frame structure of heart pine. The seating capacity was 1,200. On February 22, 1884, Minnie Hauk and her company playing "Faust" dedicated the new theatre and an account of the opening was telegraphed to all parts of the Union. On May 14, 1887, at 1 a. m., the building was destroyed by fire, said to have been the work of an incendiary. Several nearby dwellings were also burned and for a time it was feared that the St. James Hotel and all that part of town would go.

After considerable discussion the stockholders decided to rebuild and a new lease was made with Mr. Astor. Ground was broken the first week in July, 1887, and the opera house was completed and dedicated by home talent in a minstrel show, November 10, 1887. This was a modern brick building with large orchestra and a balcony all the way round to the stage; the seating capacity was 1,100. The Park opera house was destroyed in the fire of May 3, 1901, and was not rebuilt.

The former was called the Park theatre and the latter the Park opera house. In both of them Jacksonville witnessed many nationally famous plays and players of the time, including a season of grand opera.

1884

March 24: Fire, starting at 3 a. m. destroyed the Holmes Building on the south side of Bay Street between Laura and Pine (Main). Those occupying the building were: V. Botto, liquors; E. Hopkins & Co., grocers; J. Slager, auctioneer; John Dzialynski, cigar manufacturer; Ashmead, Marshall & Dobbins, photographers; Ashmead Brothers, storehouse. Loss including the building, \$45,000.

May: "Rotten Row" was torn down to make way for other buildings. After the War Between the States, a row of low wooden buildings was built on the north side of Bay