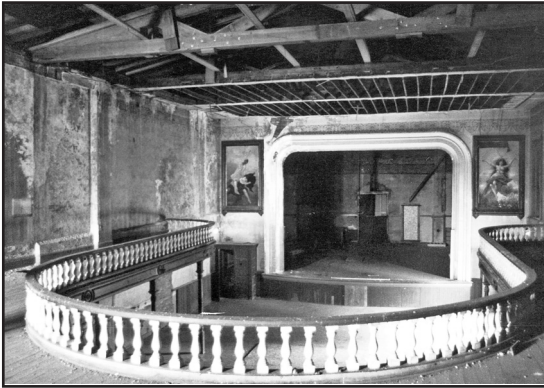


Woodward Opera House

Dr. Ebenezer Woodward had an idea to open a public entertainment venue in downtown Mount Vernon, Ohio. His idea was to bring amusements, such as vaudeville, minstrel shows, lectures and concerts to the community. On May 31, 1851, Jacob B. Brown gave Dr. Woodward a 99-year lease on the building at the corner of Main and Vine streets.



Woodward Opera House

Courtesy of the *Mount Vernon News*

Woodward Hall officially opened on December 8, 1851 to a series of lectures about geology, astronomy and electricity, given by Dr. J. F. Boynton. Another important figure who came to speak at Woodward Hall on November 11, 1875, was Victoria C. Woodhull, the first woman to run for presidency of the United States.

In March 1880, a roller skating rink was moved into Woodward Hall by Mr. Charles J. Shaffer. Between 1880 and 1882, skating parties were held weekly at Woodward Hall. On May 10, 1880, Professor J.H. Fenton, of Indianapolis, the champion roller skater of the world, gave an exhibition at the rink.

In 1883, Woodward Hall underwent major remodeling. When it opened again on January 9, 1884, the name was changed to Woodward Opera House - a more sophisticated name. In addition to the name change, the upper end of the hall was now used for gallery seating, the lower floor had new opera chairs installed, the stage was enlarged to 20-feet by 40-feet, and the seating capacity was increased to 850. The first entertainment in the "new" building was a production titled "The Hunchback."

On June 22, 1894, "Uncle" Dan Emmett (composer of *Turkey in the Straw*, *The Blue Tail Fly*) made a public performance at the Woodward with the Elks Midsummer Minstrels. On October 30, 1894, the Woodward Opera House was filled from orchestra to gallery when Governor William McKinley came to speak about revising tariffs.

The Woodward Opera house is the second oldest theater in the United States and is the oldest authentic nineteenth-century theater. Today, a fund raising campaign is currently in progress to restore the Woodward Opera House.

