

*Preserving the Past*  
THE HIBBING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

2017 - 3rd Quarter

*Special Edition*



*The  
Two Memorial  
Buildings*

All photos by Aubin

*The First Building*

The original structure was built in 1925 at a cost of \$400,000 (just over 5.5 million today). It was built on the site of the present-day Memorial Building, and dedicated on September 18 and 19, 1925, to all World War I veterans. The dedication ceremony attracted 5,000 people and included a parade. The building itself included an auditorium, skating rink, 8 curling rinks and bowling alleys, and served two-fold as a recreation building and war memorial. It was the first Memorial Building of its kind in the state, and an inscription on the front façade read, "Let us keep alive the spirit of America as exemplified in the lives of those whose service we honor."



*Fire*

At 1:15 am Thursday, December 28, 1933, the Hibbing Memorial Building was reported on fire. Firefighters from Hibbing were joined by the Keewatin Fire Department and hundreds of volunteers. They battled the flames for over 12 hours. Temperatures at the time read 33 degrees below zero, and several people were taken to the hospital with frostbite. The cold weather also prevented effective firefighting, as hose nozzles froze. Sadly the building, which was less than a decade old, was almost completely destroyed.





On December 29, the day after the fire, mayor-elect Art Timmerman announced his plans to seek federal relief money for rebuilding.



## *Rebuilding*

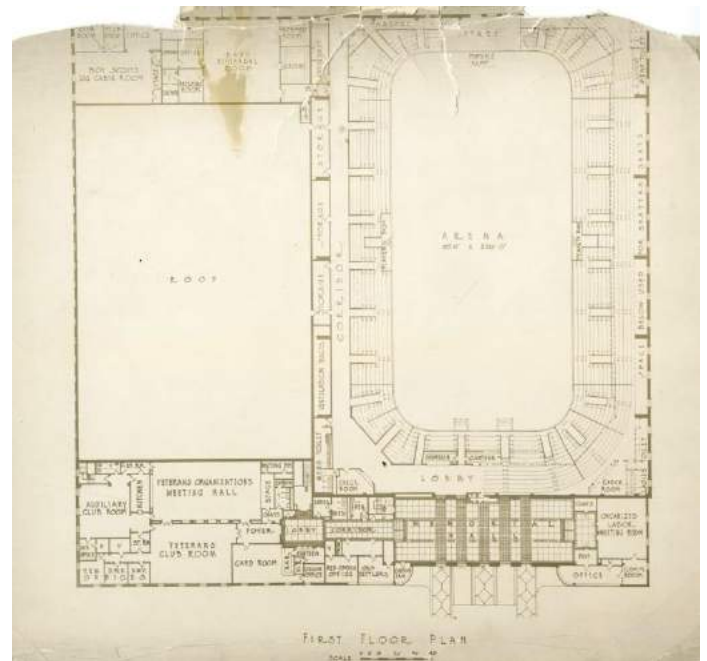
In January of 1934, the insurance appraisal was completed, and the city received \$312,995 in the settlement. Additionally, the city was able to salvage \$100,000 worth of steel scrap from the building ruins.

During the next several months, the city mailed out questionnaires to citizens asking for input on desired facilities for the new building. There were also meetings between the architect and civic groups to determine the needs of the community and what accommodations would best suit them.

All of this information was carefully considered by Architect E.R. Erickson and Village Engineer Clark Henry. The first draft of building plans was released to the public on March 9. One specific contention of these plans indicated that the new building would be built “fire-proof.” These original plans also debuted the iconic dome shape of the building’s roof.

On June 15, 1934, a \$123,400 grant was received from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (a part of Roosevelt’s New Deal), completing the city’s funding needs.

On December 28, 1934, the village observed the first anniversary of the original building fire. The next day, the Masons joined several veterans groups for the laying of the cornerstone of their new memorial building.



John Knutsen, Public Works Administration engineer and inspector on the Hibbing Memorial Building, ensured that the project employed local contractors (such as Ryder Furniture and Remington Yards), and that the men worked as many hours as the PWA permitted. The project moved along straight through the winter, with the roof's steel trusses being installed with temperatures between 30 and 40 degrees below zero. Other materials included a 16,000-pound cooling tank, 10 miles of piping, and 20,000 square feet of steel-reinforced concrete and terrazzo flooring.

### *The Second Building*

The dedication ceremony took place on November 20, 1935 at 2:30 pm. The public was invited to tour and inspect the building, and the Hibbing City band played for a large dance held in the arena that evening. Though the equipment did not arrive in time for the dedication ceremony, the Memorial Building would become the first Iron Range arena to use refrigeration to produce artificial ice. The Hibbing Daily Tribune heralded it as “the last word in modern architecture and construction.”

Over the years, the building has truly become a center point of the community, hosting MHSL sporting events including basketball and hockey, political rallies, the Last Chance Bonspiel, USFSA sanctioned figure skating competitions, concerts and music festivals, conventions and banquets, trade fairs, car shows, and much more.

"The Hibbing Memorial Building is one of the finest of its kind ever seen, and as an engineer [I have] seen many. Yes sir, the people of Hibbing are getting a real building, dollar for dollar."

–John  
Knutsen



*“Let Us Designate It Properly”*  
–Hibbing Daily Tribune  
(Tuesday Evening - November 19, 1935)

*“Under what title should we designate our splendid new Memorial building? Let us decide on the eve of the dedication so that at least we can select a name that will be used by all, respectful to the worthy cause we honor Wednesday.*

*Let us ever remember that the building was originally built to honor those men who gave their lives that democracy might live. This beautiful new structure should be known to every one of us as the Hibbing Memorial building. It should not be referred to as the “Rec.” It is first and last a memorial, consecrated and dedicated to the men and women who served their country.*

...

*To the people of Hibbing, it is not only a Memorial but a community and civic center, where people of all walks of life, all creeds and nationalities can meet and enjoy associations and recreation.*

*Why not learn to dedicate this beautiful new building properly – right at the start?”*



During World War II, the Memorial Building was converted into barracks, a mess hall, officer's quarters, and a canteen for U.S. Army Air Corp trainees. The trainees received ground school instruction at the Hibbing Junior College (then located at the Hibbing High School) and flight training at the Hibbing School/Chisholm airport.



The rink – centrally located within the city of Hibbing - was used by the NHL's Chicago Blackhawks for their training camps on six occasions in the late 1930's and 1940's (shown above in 1939).

*“This is the Iron Range and the Iron Range is the power of the United States. I believe we need an administration that will put this country to work again, that will move this country forward.”*

*Senator John F. Kennedy*

*October 2, 1960*

*Hibbing Memorial Building*

*Kennedy spoke to a crowd of over 10,000 and was accompanied by Governor Orville Freeman and Senator Hubert Humphrey.*

The arena permanently seats 3,460. Additional floor seating for 1,000 plus standing room for 1,000 more brings the total arena occupancy to 5,460. The building currently houses the Hibbing Curling Club, Hibbing Historical Society, and City of Hibbing Parks and Recreation offices, as well as veteran and community meeting rooms.



At left:

President Harry S. Truman, with daughter Margaret Truman and Senator Humbert H. Humphrey at the Hibbing Memorial Building – October 28, 1952.

### *Aubin Collection*

The historical society is incredibly pleased to announce that we have been awarded two grants to work specifically on the Aubin Studios photograph collection. The first was awarded by the Minnesota Historical Society Legacy grant program in the amount of \$8450, and will provide additional staff time and archival materials to scan, store, and catalog a portion of this collection, including the photographs used in this special edition newsletter. This process will lead to the development of an online database for viewing by the public.

The second grant was awarded by the Minnesota Digital Library, and will allow over 200 panoramic images from the Aubin collection to be sent to Minneapolis for scanning. These images will be available on the Minnesota Reflections website later this year.

Work on these projects began July 1<sup>st</sup>.



### *Spring Fundraiser*

Over one hundred members and guests attended the annual Spring Fundraiser at the Androy on Friday, May 5th. This year's exhibits and program revolved around Hibbing's first industry—logging. Curator Erica Larson displayed many of the museum's artifacts including: a large two-man saw and wayfaring tools such as sextant and compass. Also displayed were the tools of the trade of the most important employee of the logging camp, the cook.

Board member and volunteer, Linda Suihkonen, presented a short program on the history of logging in and around Hibbing. She also donned a fur hat and plaid jacket to tell the audience a bit about the most famous lumberjack of all, Paul Bunyan.

This year's Silent Auction was our most successful ever, thanks to many generous donors and bidders.

## Calendar

**Hibbing Birthday Party – Tuesday August 8<sup>th</sup>** – Please join us for Hibbing’s 124<sup>th</sup> birthday at 6:30 pm on the lawn of City Hall. Inductees to the Hall of Service and Achievement will be Alex Chisholm and Irma Mattioli McCarthy. The City Band will perform, and cake and punch will be served! Some chairs will be available, but you may want to bring your own. In the event of rain, this program will be moved to the dining room at the Hibbing Memorial Building.

Fall meeting – Saturday October 21<sup>st</sup>

Christmas – Friday December 8<sup>th</sup>

## Burger Bash

A huge thank you to Sandy Rohwer and staff for allowing us to host a very successful Burger Bash at Palmer’s on Thursday, June 15th. The weather was perfect! As a result, nearly 150 people showed up at the patio to support the Historical Society. Burger baskets included freshly grilled burgers, chips, coleslaw and chocolate chip cookies. Raffle prizes included a private wine class, a Moscow Mule basket, a Bemidji Brewing basket (co-owners, Megan Better-Hill and Tom Hill, former Hibbingites), and a deck box filled with assorted beverages. This event would not have been possible without the sponsorship of Bemidji Brewing, Lowe’s, Sunny Hill, Sunrise Deli, Super One, Total Wine and More, Walmart and several members and friends. Kudos to all Board Members for pitching in. It was a fun evening filled with camaraderie!



Below: The space that the Hibbing Historical Society now occupies within the Memorial Building was originally a bowling alley.

