

The “New” Hall

by Lori Treloar

The fire started on the roof of the original Shawnigan Lake Athletic Association Hall just after noon on April 2, 1930. With high winds that day, the fire spread quickly to other buildings along the village waterfront. Essentially, the commercial core for Shawnigan was destroyed. A small cottage, once part of the hotel property, was the only survivor. Most of the businesses quickly found temporary quarters including the library which opened one week after the fire.



There was no quick fix for the loss of the hall. The Directors of the SLAA worked diligently for the eighteen months following the fire to collect the insurance money and then to replace the building which was central to the activities of the community. Fortunately for the shareholders it was determined that the cause of the fire was slash burning by the E & N Railway. The E & N vehemently denied the claim but lost their suit.

Countless, lengthy meetings of the SLAA Directors were held to determine the best course of action. Many decisions had to be made such as whether to rebuild on the same site, what size the building should be and who would build it. The architect hired to design the building produced a plan that was far too rich for the budget of the shareholders. His plan was never used. The sale of shares for the Association, which had been closed, opened once again for a short period of time to augment the insurance money.

More than a year after the fire, the debris from the site was finally cleared. The new hall opened October 10, 1931 with a dinner and dance. Workers were kept busy with finishing details right up until opening day. The new hall was more utilitarian in form and function. It provided more interior space but was less attractive from the outside. That did not matter in the least. Soon after the opening dance, the directors arranged for the use of the hall for the Badminton and Basketball groups. Their next order of business was to organize a Hallowe'en dinner and, not surprisingly, a dance for two weeks later.

The hall was owned and operated by the SLAA until the company disbanded in 1963. The hall and property was then turned over to the Shawnigan Lake Recreation Commission

Sadly, the “new” hall, which still stands on the site of the original 1910 hall, was sold to provide part of the down payment for the Shawnigan Lake Community Centre.