

A Danceland Story

While it is widely thought & believed that the present day Danceland was built in 1928 the Watrous Signal (WS) and Village tax records show it was in fact built in 1930.

Much of the research material came from The Watrous Signal (WS) newspaper microfiche in Saskatchewan Archives as well as tax records in the Resort Village of Manitou Beach Village Office.

Danceland: The original dancehall was probably built in 1919 by either the Manitou Beach Company Ltd (the Manitou Beach hotel, located across the road from the dance pavilion, was built 1919) or the Investment Co. Both companies were incorporated in 1919 and Ed. Austin was involved with both. It is not clear from photos which lot of block F, G500 was occupied by the dance pavilion and the paper trail is scant so far. Village tax assessment ledgers begin in 1920 and many of the 1919 Watrous Signal (WS) newspapers are not in the Saskatchewan Archives. There is a brief sentence in a 1922 WS article which alludes to the Investment Co as being owners but it is not conclusive. The answer to this particular puzzle may well be with Austin family records in the USA. WS show the building was enlarged in 1925.

For the present day Danceland there is a paper trail. Using Village tax assessment records and WS articles I

discovered, much to my surprise, that Wellington White purchased lot 1, block F, G500 in 1927 from Hixon & Fisher and this is the legal address for present day Danceland (present day owner Millie Streuby's info).

September 1929 WS indicates White is considering building a new dancehall, 86ft. x 132ft. with a Cant Lever silver birch floor at a cost of about \$50,000.

April 1930 WS & Village Council minutes show that White was granted a building permit for a dancehall---the wood was ordered the previous month says a WS item.

May & June 1930 WS give some building progress reports.

Thursday July 3 1930 WS talks about the opening of the dancehall the previous Saturday (June 28) and that Guy Watkins & his band provided the music for the dance on Dominion Day.

I did look at microfiche for some Saskatoon newspapers for opening night "ads" but found none. An archivist is quite sure that at that time the radio would have been the medium of choice for advertising the new dance pavilion rather than the newspaper.

So, "Old" Danceland, likely built in 1919 and was bought in 1927 (Village tax records) by Wellington White. "New" Danceland was built in 1930 (I do not know the name of the construction company) & financed by Wellington White with likely some involvement of Guy Watkins. Watkins certainly operated Danceland for several years.

The oral tradition has it that the dance floor from the first dancehall was used for the floor in the Wigwam – a tent-type dance hall open for business 1930 & 1931.

It is probable that over the years the two words, bought & built, were interchanged and eventually, via the oral tradition, it became fixed in peoples' minds that Danceland was built in 1928 rather than 1930. Or perhaps that because Wellington White purchased the hall in 1927, operated it in 1928, that it was felt he built the place that same year. Fascinating how time & the re-telling of something can create a change in a story.

A copy of this info material, esp. the 1930 items, has been given to Danceland owners Millie & Arnie Strueby so this will not be a surprise. Danceland, as a result, has celebrated two 80th anniversary celebrations! One in 2008 and the next two years later.