



Super  
Town of  
Albion  
Revitalization  
Team

[www.albionstarteam.org](http://www.albionstarteam.org)

## History of the Albion Opera House

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While little is recorded about Charles Albert Howard, it is known that he was first a farmer. It is said that he had several businesses, including being a basket maker. He was also the owner of Howard's Opera House.

Constructed in 1884, brick work was completed in July, according to an account in the Noble County American. Howard and his floor manager, Rocco Garamone, a barber and Italian harpist of fame, hosted an Opening Ball for Howard's Opera House on October 23, 1884. Dignitaries from all of Noble County's cities, towns and villages were invited to attend. This was quite an affair, including a dinner served at the Denlar restaurant located south of the courthouse. Music was provided by the popular Sac Brothers orchestra from Ligonier. A dance caller from Michigan was also engaged. Accounts of this event say it was well attended.

A newspaper article indicated that on January 1, 1885, a walking match was held at Howard's Opera House between Miss [May] Marshall and Samuel Bixler of this county — the lady was the loser.

Another account from that same 1885 newspaper stated, "The Opera House [skating] rink is the finest in the county.

On May 14, 1885, the second commencement of Albion High School was held at Howard's Opera House.

Saturday, May 30, 1885, was Albion's Decoration Day program. Attendees first went to Rose Hill Cemetery and then returned to the Opera House for an eloquent and touching oration delivered by Judge R. Wes McBride of Waterloo, Indiana.

It is written that - on the last Saturday evening in June at 8 p.m. - the Methodist Church was holding a social in the court yard grove. Albion citizens were regaled with the sight and sound of a regular jubilee when from the balcony of the Opera House, overlooking the social scene, arose the rich strains of religious hymns sung in fervent style by the Davy Crockett Company - which later gave a performance of, "The Shadows of a Great City," on the stage of the Opera House.

Because the Noble County Courthouse constructed in 1861 had been outgrown, it was decided to build a new structure. So on August 10, 1887, the old brick courthouse was sold. That afternoon, a force of men and teams moved the contents of the several offices across Jefferson Street to Howard's Opera House. For about 18 months, county



business was conducted in the Opera House, until the present courthouse was completed and ready for use in 1889.

An account from a September 1887 newspaper stated, "**Our old friend Charlie Howard, of Albion, was badly gulled by the Board of Commissioners renting his opera house for the use of the county offices and court room for the pittance of \$500 per year. He ought to have had a cool \$1,000.**"

Goodman's original Tennessee Jubilee Singers presented an evening of entertainment at Howard's Opera House in Albion on October 2, 1890. The company was composed of 11 members.

A select masque ball was held on the evening of February 18, 1891, at the Opera House.

Members of the Albion Military Band played for a masquerade skating at the Opera House on Saturday evening, according to a February 26, 1891 newspaper article. A gold medal prize was given to the skater wearing the most beautiful costume. A small admittance fee was charged. It was reported in the March 12, 1891, edition of the newspaper that Miss Anna Graves of Kendallville captured the gold medal offered by the band for the handsomest costume.

Sometime, possibly in late February or early March, 1891, Frank G. Mills started a saloon on the west side of the lower story of the Albion Opera House building.

It was reported on April 9, 1891, that there would be a walking or running race at the Opera House on Saturday evening for a purse of \$5.00. Contestants were Jay Hardenbrook and Burt Mullen of Albion. Admittance was ten cents. The race was to commence at 8 p.m. and the distance was 10 miles.

Albion has had many forms of entertainment over the years to draw people to town. Anthony Kimmell was manager of the Opera House by now, and secured many clean and entertaining shows which were well attended and brought people to town. In 1892, Jay Hardenbrook and Albert Williams staged a 75-mile walking match in the Opera House which was accompanied by band music.

Charles Albert Howard passed away in July, 1902 at the age of 62.

Documents indicate that the Albion Opera House was used annually from 1908 through 1929 for the Noble County Common School Graduation. Diplomas were issued to eighth grade students from across the county at the Noble County Courthouse, then a program was held in the Opera House. Later in the afternoon there would be a field day with awards presented to winners of the various events ranging from

athletic competitions to mathematical challenges. The account for the Common School Graduates - 1908 reads:

**“Twelfth Annual Commencement of the Common School Graduates of Noble County on Wednesday, May 27, 1908, at Albion Indiana. Albion Opera House 10:30 a.m. At Dr. Lemmon's pasture field, shot put and running broad jumps. 1:30 p.m. Band concert on court house lawn. Mathematical race, 100 yards dash, 440 yards run, running high jump and pole vault.”**

In her book, *Albion Memories*, Linda Shultz wrote, “The Opera House on the west side of the square over the abstract and lawyer’s office was one of the most popular places in town for many years. High school graduation services and Memorial Day programs were held here. It served as a movie theatre for a time. Many can remember seeing *Birth of a Nation* on the screen. School musicals were also presented there.

When basketball games were played in the Opera House, there was one row of seats around the floor. When the games started, everyone would sit on the backs of their chairs so as to keep their feet off the playing floor.

Orchestras performed and renditions of the Grand Ole Opera were held. License courses were given at the Opera House. The community held potluck suppers there in the 30’s.

The Opera House was also used as an armory during World War II. The equipment was stored on the first floor and the training was in the Opera House upstairs.

The Sunday Nighters, a youth fellowship group in the 40’s gave a show based on music by Stephen Foster. It was a meeting place for many organizations in later years [including the Noble County 4-H Junior Leaders Organization to which I belonged]. It was also a place for square dances.”

On the first floor, Kenneth Thomas operated an abstract office on the east side. Charles Frazee maintained his law office in this area where you are seated. For a time, Milo Troyer manufactured snaths, skish rings and bull rings in the back of the lower level.

According to Tod Wolfrum, who was the proprietor of Excel Home Furnishings and other business interests, sometime in the mid-1960’s, the upper level was purchased by Excel Home Furnishings from the Albion Development Corporation. They used the area for a furniture show room. Fortunately, the stage structure was basically left intact. This arrangement made the building Albion’s only condominium scheme at the time. Bill Franks, an accomplished carpenter from Wawaka, was hired to build a bridge from the upstairs of the Excel building west of the alley to the upper level of the Opera House. Franks also installed several cubicles in which furniture could be arranged in room settings. These remain today.

Excel Home Furnishings also purchased a building that was immediately to the east of the Opera House. It had been the Albion American Legion Post for many years - being vacated when the current Legion Post was built. There was an outside covered stairwell that rose from the sidewalk between the two buildings, providing access to the upper level of the Opera House. The east building was eventually purchased by the owner of the filling station and has since been torn down.

That move necessitated installing a new exterior stairs to the upper floor of the Opera House as you see it today.

Ironically, in 1987, Noble County government needed space, and 100 years after being a tenant in the Opera House, the commissioners

rented it again. This time, the rent was \$450 per month - which included utilities. *(Unfortunately, Mr. Howard wasn’t around to be the recipient of this increased rent!)*

The Opera House has been vacant for well over 20 years with the exception that David Thomas used the lower level for storage. About the only noteworthy event associated with the building in recent years is the fact that a portion of the roof was rolled back during a wind storm that struck the area some time back. It looked as if it was a huge open sardine can lid. Repairs followed with some of the roof being replaced and some of it being restored.



## The S.T.A.R. Team Mission Statement

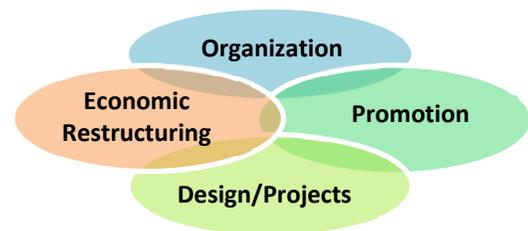
The S.T.A.R. Team is organized to assist the Town of Albion in the historical preservation, enhancement, and maintenance of buildings and instill community heritage in the downtown business district while assisting the Courthouse Square Preservation Society.

## What is the S.T.A.R. Team?

The role of the S.T.A.R. Team is to implement the techniques of the Main Street program. The Main Street program, created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and established in 1977, is operated by the National Main Street Center. Visit [www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/) to learn more about the Main Street program.

This program emphasizes a four-point strategy implemented by the S.T.A.R. Team – organization, promotion, design/projects, and economic restructuring. This program will be effective as long as there is both public and private participation within the community.

### *S.T.A.R. Team Committees*



Consider volunteering on one of the committees above. The S.T.A.R. Team can assist your business with a façade grant (for qualifying businesses) in conjunction with the Town of Albion.

## S.T.A.R. Team Events

Albion’s S.T.A.R. events occur on designated dates between May and December. The events take place near and around the Courthouse Square at 6 p.m. where citizens can partake in fun-filled activities while visiting local businesses for eating and shopping. The community’s citizens and businesses are encouraged to participate in the festivities. *The tentative list of S.T.A.R. events listed at [www.albionstarteam.org](http://www.albionstarteam.org) are subject to change.* Please contact Mary Ann Troutner at 1-260-564-0341 for event information.

For more information, please contact the S.T.A.R. Team Officers:

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