



The Assembly Hall

A Lakeshore Landmark Since 1898

The Assembly Hall was built in 1898 as part of the Mimico Lunatic Asylum. The hall was located on the northeast corner of the hospital grounds, at the corner of Lake Shore Boulevard West and Kipling Avenue. The Asylum changed names repeatedly over the years, becoming the Mimico Hospital for the Insane in 1911, the Ontario Hospital, New Toronto in 1919 and finally renamed as the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital. But the Assembly Hall remained throughout – a landmark facility, both for hospital residents and for the larger Lakeshore community.

Patient labour was used to construct the Assembly Hall and various other hospital buildings because the hospital's superintendent, Dr. Nelson Henry Beemer, was a strong believer in meaningful work as a form of rehabilitative therapy. The Assembly Hall served as a place of recreation and worship for the patients, hospital staff and local residents. Weekly church services, dances and concerts all took place. Because there was no comparable facility in the area, the Assembly Hall was the principal gathering place for community events, such as the celebration of the extension of the Long Branch streetcar along Lake Shore Boulevard West.

But time took its toll – by the late 1930s, the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital had fallen into a state of disrepair. A 1937 inspection described the Assembly Hall as “a firetrap.” Fortunately, the arrival of Dr. H. C. Moorhouse in 1959 as the new superintendent brought about a revitalization of the entire facility. The Assembly Hall continued in its role as home to square dances, religious services and local celebrations until the hospital closed its doors in September 1979.

As politicians, developers and local residents debated the eventual fate of the Lakeshore Grounds and buildings, the site continued to decline. While several of the hospital buildings were renovated for use by Humber College, the Assembly Hall remained empty and neglected. In response to the advocacy of a committed group of local residents and arts groups, the former City of Etobicoke completed a Feasibility Study for the Assembly Hall project in 1997. Council approved capital funds in 1998 to restore the Assembly Hall as a community cultural centre. With the amalgamation of the Greater City of Toronto, this project passed into the hands of the Culture Division, under the auspices of the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department.

Teeple Architects Inc., / Lett/Smith Architects were awarded the project, based on their design concept, which wedded the original brick structure to a modern glass atrium that provides a bright and airy entranceway to the Assembly Hall. In 1999, the construction tender was awarded to the McBride Group. On a very chilly February 14, 2000, Mayor Mel Lastman braved the elements to join local councillors and citizens for the official ground-breaking. Mayor Lastman welcomed the project, stating *“This historic building will become a treasured resource for our city and a great cultural centre for the community”*.

The restored Assembly Hall has been designed to meet a variety of cultural and community needs. The beautiful 250+ seat Performance Hall is a venue for music, theatre, dance, receptions and special events. The community rooms are used for art classes, meetings, workshops and rehearsals. Gallery spaces for visual arts are located throughout the building. The Assembly Hall is a rental facility, providing reasonably priced space for public and private use.

In recognition of the Assembly Hall's restoration, Opening Celebrations were held from May 31 to June 17, 2001, welcoming artists, performers and the entire community to this beautiful facility. Now, after a decade of serving as the home for an ever-growing list of wonderful events, the Assembly Hall has once again become a significant local landmark, *“a gathering place at the heart of the Lakeshore, where community and creativity are celebrated and nurtured.”*