

Thomaston Opera House Building Committee Special Meeting Minutes
Friday, August 1, 2025, 3:30 PM Selectman's Conference Room



In attendance: Mike Burr, Jeff Dunn, Gary Kingsbury, Matt Stancavage, Scott Theriault, Frank Treglia and David Verdosci.

Called to Order at 3:32 PM

Correspondence – A letter from Michael Madow was received into record. J. Dunn provided a letter from the town hall mail room addressed to TOHBC. It will be received at next meeting.

Minutes of Previous Meeting – July 18, 2025 No minutes were available to review at meeting. No action was taken and suggested they get reviewed and approved at next meeting.

Reports-

Grant Applications G. Kingsbury reported he is making progress on the contract for the Phase 2 grant.

Old Business

- Burlington update M. Burr reported on meeting #23. It included reviewing the masonry work, grout colors and wavy lines. To be determined how to rectify.
The elevator installation is expected to start next week between Aug 2-8, 2025. There remain concerns over leaks in the various areas from the new construction. Contractor is adding flashing and continuing to observe. There were also discussions of required change orders for electrical and the elevator elevations.
- Friends MOU transfer status – no report given. Their meeting is next week.
- Burlington CHRO status – No update at this time.
- Phase 2 Architect RFP – M. Burr asked if anyone would like to help with the RFP. J. Dunn and G. Kingsbury agreed to work on it.
- Budget Update- There were no changes to the budget at this time
- Windows- M. Burr is creating a punch list for the painters. He identified problems with painting interfering with other work being completed. He has asked that they complete the painting once the remaining interior work is complete.
- Attic cleaning- D. Verdosci has worked on removing some of the remaining items from the attic. A dumpster will be needed. Work will continue over the next few weeks.

New Business

- Ceiling Stencils – J. Dunn present information from Evergreene Studios with suggestion how to potentially address the need to change the look of the swastikas in the ceiling. There are 3 potential designs. The initial cost was estimated at \$16,500. However, if local labors were provided through LCT the cost would be reduced to \$8,750. There was extensive discussion on the proposal. J. Dunn motioned to recommend to the Thomaston Opera House Commission to review and consider changing symbols to something different. It was seconded by G. Kingsbury. The motion passed unanimously.
- Invoices –Burlington Construction M. Burr reported the most recent invoice has been paid.
- Site walk

Next Meeting Date – August 15, 2025

Adjournment – S. Theriault motioned to adjourn at 4:47 PM. Seconded by M. Stancavage.
Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Jeffrey Dunn

July 17, 2025

To: Thomaston Opera House Commission and Opera House Restoration / Building Committee

From: Michael Meadow

RE: Swastikas on the Ceiling at the Thomaston Opera House

After much thought, reflection, and research I have decided to reach out to your committee regarding the Swastikas that have been included as part of the recent restoration of the Thomaston Opera House.

While I am not one to remove or slow history (in fact, an ever-present precept in my culture is "NEVER FORGET"), we must also look at all history and current events in our Western Culture.

As you are aware, this symbol is very old, much older than the appropriation of the symbol by the German Nazi Party in the 1930's. It has origins dating back thousands of years meaning "wellbeing" and was used as a symbol of good fortune and luck. It is still used today as a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions in Asia and eastern culture.

Let's be unequivocal: symbols do not exist in a vacuum. Regardless of their ancient origins, the swastika has been irreversibly transformed by the atrocities of the Nazi regime. It has become, inescapably, the most powerful and recognizable emblem of antisemitism, genocide, and white supremacy in the modern world. To suggest that an informational sign in the lobby can "undo" that connotation is naive at best and deeply dismissive at worst.

Despite its ancient meaning, the swastika has become a symbol of terror for millions. More than 12 million lives—including six million Jewish people—were annihilated under its banner. That reality obliterates any previous associations. Pretending otherwise denies the moral trauma that continues to reverberate through generations.

Defenders of the ceiling's restoration argue that the swastikas were preserved (reintroduced after years of being covered) for the sake of "historical accuracy." But historic preservation does not and must not mean blindly restoring everything regardless of how it impacts living communities.

Would we leave a noose hanging in a restored Southern courthouse because it was "part of the original design"? Of course not. We understand that some symbols have become irredeemable, and to display them is to reopen wounds. This is no different.

THIS symbol is what people will perceive when they come into our Town and into our beautiful Opera House. If Thomaston keeps those symbols on our ceiling, we will be seen by many as a community that not only tolerates this ideal but perpetuates it. It has happened in other communities and I would hate for it to happen in our town.

There are also economic detriments to keeping the Swastikas at the Opera House. The facility is currently leased to Landmark Community Theatre. The town has effectively placed the burden on our tenant to explain and take the brunt of having this symbol on the ceiling.

Is the historic ceiling worth alienating patrons, hurting ticket sales, and turning a cultural space into a source of public controversy? Of course not. Especially when the solution—altering or changing the swastikas—is both simple and already historically precedent: they were covered in the 1930s for exactly the same reason.

For the benefit of our community and future viability of our Thomaston Opera House, I am strongly requesting that the symbols be altered to a design that removes the resemblance of a Swastika or completely remove and paint over the symbols with another design.

7/18/2025

The Alliance for Jewish Theatre
838 Walker Road
Suite 21-2 #138
Dover, DE 19904

To the Thomaston Opera House Restoration Building Committee,

It is with alarm and frustration that the Alliance for Jewish Theatre, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving Jewish theatre worldwide, learned of the restoration of swastikas to the ceiling of the Thomaston Opera House. We, the organization's Board of Directors, feel compelled to speak out to encourage the Committee to right this wrong.

We have read the committee's explanation that the symbols are "historic", but in Western consciousness the swastika no longer evokes its Sanskrit origins of "prosperity" or "well-being". It evokes Hitler. It evokes the Holocaust. It is a symbol forever marked by Nazi atrocities and the slaughter of six million Jews.

We have seen, too, the argument that the swastika appears in other buildings across the country. That is true. It is equally true that every time Jews see one adorning a building, their stomachs knot and a sense of fear and rage surges through them. For survivors and their families, it is even more traumatic, evoking memories of families murdered and communities destroyed.

While we appreciate the venue providing educational context for the symbols, in our opinion the Thomaston Opera House is not a suitable space for the reclamation or rehabilitation of the swastika. In fact, its presence there will continue to upset those who are sensitive to its modern context and, perhaps worse, normalize the symbol for those who would use it inappropriately. By placing it back on the ceiling, there is an implication that swastikas are acceptable decorations. In so doing, the restoration inadvertently offers cover to those who continue to use the swastika as a symbol of hate.

The effect of the decisions made is this: patrons and performers are asked to overlook a symbol associated with genocide looming above them. Why should actors on that stage, especially in Jewish-themed productions like the upcoming *Fiddler on the Roof*, have to ignore what they know is out there in the dark? Why should an actor playing the Jewish Tevye, looking skyward to commune with God, have to direct his gaze toward a constellation of swastikas? How could a Jewish performer, or any performer sensitive to the 12 million who died in the Nazi camps, feel comfortable in such an environment? And why should patrons' experience of the beautiful ceiling be marred by the presence of a symbol that many will find repulsive? Why should they be forced to try and enjoy a show in the midst of their discomfort?

The Alliance for Jewish Theatre unequivocally denounces the decision to restore these swastikas and we urge the committee to remove them as soon as possible. This can be done

with thoughtfulness and transparency. We encourage the committee to seek supplemental funding, either through government sources or a dedicated campaign, to help cover the cost and support this correction. Educational signage could remain to explain the symbols' historical presence, and highlight why the community chose to remove them again today. That would be an honest and responsible way to tell the story of the restoration.

AJT also offers itself as a resource to the committee and the community. It is our desire to educate and help heal the rift. This moment is one for humility and learning for all; there is still much room for understanding and growth and the possibility of moving forward together. We are happy to assist in any way we can or direct the committee to useful resources.

Thank you for considering our input and for engaging in conversation around this sensitive topic.

Sincerely,
The Board of Directors
Alliance for Jewish Theatre

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