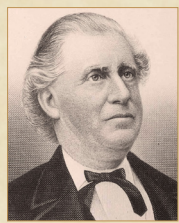




THE GOODSPEED OPERA HOUSE 150 YEARS *on the* RIVER



1876 — William Goodspeed builds an ornate Victorian opera house for East Haddam, envisioned as a grand civic hub where commerce, community life, and the performing arts could thrive together. Some local residents are skeptical and call it “Goodspeed’s Folly.”

1877 — The Opera House is dedicated and opens as a cultural gathering place for the town—the building held a dentist, post office, butcher, and general store.

1877-1882 — Goodspeed personally produces and transports shows via the Connecticut River, gaining a reputation for offering entertainment unmatched by towns of similar size.



1882 — William Goodspeed dies, and the building begins a gradual decline.

1890 — The Opera House is part of daily life along the river before a bridge connected the banks. The stage is used for amateur theatricals and costume balls.

1910 — The Opera House remains open as a commercial and civic space, hosting occasional community events.

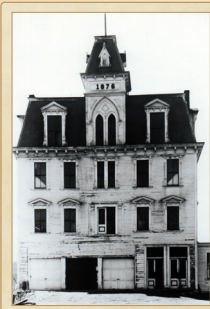
1913 — The East Haddam Swing Bridge opens, signaling a new era of travel and access across the river.



1918 — New state fire safety laws prohibit public use of the theatre, unless costly upgrades are made. Performances cease indefinitely.

World War I — The building serves as headquarters for the Connecticut Militia.

1920-1930s — Ownership changes multiple times, and the remaining businesses gradually vacate. The building sits empty as deterioration accelerates.



World War II — The State of Connecticut buys the building, removes the porch, and converts the front into a garage.

Post-World War II — The Opera House is abandoned entirely. Attempts are made to reopen the building, including an effort by Katharine Hepburn, but none succeed.

1952-1958 — Calls to demolish the Opera House intensify. By the late 50s, local preservationists mobilize to save the building.

1959 — The Goodspeed Opera House Foundation Inc. is formed by two local women, Mrs. Paul (Libby) Kaye and Mrs. Alfred Howe Terry. They rally the community to save the Opera House, and the state sells them the building for the sum of one silver dollar. In its first year, 801 people became members of the Foundation, led by a major gift from Muriel Wiggin Selden.

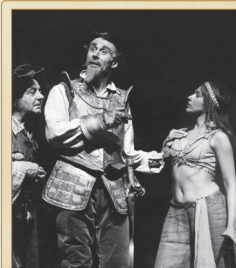
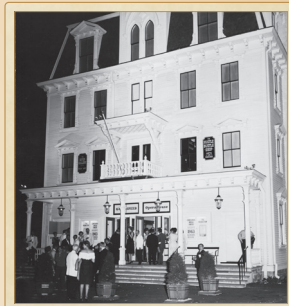


1960 — Restoration begins with a “plaster-ripping party,” serving the dual purpose of saving labor costs as well as gaining publicity. Hundreds partake, including Gov. Abraham Ribicoff. Small chunks of plaster are sold as souvenirs of the original Opera House.



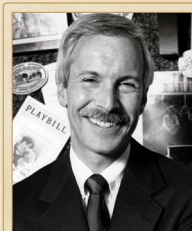
1960–1963 — Restoration is more than cosmetic. The theatre has to be completely gutted and rebuilt. Preservationists carefully restore Victorian charm through ornate detailing, intimate lobby spaces, and the recreation of its 19th-century atmosphere.

1963 — The Goodspeed Opera House reopens on June 18 with the inaugural production *Oh, Lady! Lady!*. This marks the first theatrical performance in the building since 1902. President John F. Kennedy sends a congratulatory message marking the occasion.



1965 — Goodspeed produces *Man of La Mancha*, signaling a new era of ambitious musical theatre, with the show opening on Broadway the next year. *La Mancha*’s success instantly makes Goodspeed a “tryout house,” transforming the then-new company into a powerhouse for developing future Broadway hits.

1968 — Michael Price becomes Executive Director, helping shape the organization’s modern identity. Price served in that position for 47 years, producing over 250 classic musicals, 100 new musicals, and transferring 19 shows to Broadway.



1971 — The Goodspeed Opera House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 30.



1976 — *Annie* has its world premiere on the Goodspeed stage on August 10. Despite a rocky start, scathing reviews and numerous rewrites, *Annie* goes on to become an international sensation—and returns to The Goodspeed in 2026 to celebrate its 50th anniversary!

1980 — Goodspeed wins a Special Tony Award for outstanding contributions to the American musical.

1995 — Because the theatre never actually hosted any operas, The Goodspeed Opera House Foundation changes its name to Goodspeed Musicals to more accurately reflect its mission as a producer of musicals.



1995 — Goodspeed wins a second Special Tony Award for distinguished achievement for a regional theatre, making history as the first such institution to hold two special Tonys.

2013 — Goodspeed Musicals celebrates its 50th Anniversary.

2025 — A brand new ADA-compliant front entrance with a ramp and automatic doors to accommodate patrons with wheelchairs is installed.

2026 — The Opera House turns 150! From “Goodspeed’s Folly” to the internationally acclaimed home for musical theatre, the story continues... because of you.

