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By 1888, when the Kebo Valley Golf Club—then only the eighth golf club in America—was founded, Bar Harbor had become an international destination. The clubhouse was a new social center away from the hotels, where the cottagers often found themselves mixing, to their distaste, with the hoi polloi. In addition to golf and tennis, the clubhouse's sweeping lawns and elegant verandas provided a place for Society to promenade in the afternoon, and a theater provided a spot for performances and balls.

In 1899, the clubhouse burned. A new one was built, but without a theater. By 1905, this absence was felt, and a few leaders of the summer community decided to build for the Arts a facility as fine as those already provided for the Amusements (Yachting, Drinking, Golf, and Tennis). A site was chosen at the edge of the Kebo’s putting green, which would double as an outdoor amphitheater.
Five members of the summer colony financed the project: Mrs. Henry Dimock; George W. Vanderbilt; George B. Dorr, who would later found Acadia National Park; Henry Lane Eno, whose forebears built New York’s original Fifth Avenue Hotel; and Mrs. Robert Abbe. For the design, the group commissioned Guy Lowell, architect of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The original theatre at Kebo Valley had been in the Shingle Style, but taste had changed, and it was decided that a Greek temple under the pine trees would provide the most appropriate setting for the arts.

Unlike the ancient structures that inspired it, this temple was not built of marble, but stucco, “finished to represent Parian marble.” According to The New York Times, the red Venetian tile roof was supported by “the largest wooden columns ever turned in Maine.” Copies of the Parthenon friezes were imported from Paris and mounted on the facade. Inside, the walls and ceiling of the stage and proscenium adapted principles of sounding boards in the great German concert halls, and natural lighting was provided “from the top after the manner of the ancient Greek shrines.

The proscenium’s curtain was of elaborately embroidered gold English damask specially woven for the building, the joint gift of George Vanderbilt and Mrs. John Inness Kane, whose late husband was the great-grandson of John Jacob Astor. The new Bar Harbor “Temple for the Arts” attracted national attention, with arti-
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Performers and patrons, clockwise from top left: Poet, playwright, and novelist Natalie Barney, painted by her mother, Alice Pike, a.k.a. A-lister Mrs. Albert Clifford Barney; a vintage postcard captures President William Howard Taft golfing on the grounds of the arts temple he was never tempted to enter; virtuoso conductor Leopold Stokowski; a young and almost-famous Henry Fonda.

In 1916, Davis was playing at evening dances at the fashionable Malvern Hotel. Mrs. Davis remembered watching the orchestra through a glass door behind the ballroom stage one evening and seeing a compact man, dapper in a gray suit, enter the back of the room. Rather than take a seat as she expected, the man, unseen by the audience, suddenly broke into a little (Continued on page 74)
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erts Rinehart, Mrs. Gerrish Milliken, and Edith Vanderbilt Fabbri—than with the performance. Notably absent from the audience were husbands, either back at their offices in New York, or on their yachts, or perhaps even on the golf course next to the amphitheatre.

A 1941 exhibit was held for benefit of the American British Art Center's war efforts. Cecil Beaton's then unpublished series "London's Honourable Scars," recent London war posters and 25 sketches by J.M.W. Turner, were shown. By the next season, wartime gas rationing had made travel to remote Bar Harbor difficult, and the resort was a virtual ghost town, with many cottages shuttered that season.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. was among those who had quietly made up the Building of Arts' deficit for years. By 1941, the Building could no longer pay its taxes, and the town of Bar Harbor was about to foreclose on its liens. Rockefeller purchased the building for $500, hoping to secure its future as a center for culture. In 1944, he found that adequate support was not forthcoming, and the building was sold to Consuella de Sides, a follower of Indian spiritual master and self-proclaimed 'Avatar' Meher Baba. She intended to make it again a center of performance, but fate had other plans. In October 1947, Bar Harbor was swept by a devastating forest fire. The Building of Arts lay directly in its path, and the make-believe temple of plaster and wood was destroyed.

Kebo Valley Club itself survives. The famous 17th 'Elbow Hole,' where President Taft carded 27 in 1910 remains. In the grove behind, the steps to the Building of Arts remain, leading nowhere. ■

For more, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2014/03/pulpit/artsbuilding