

## A PAGE FROM OUR PAST

## Building has served McLean for nearly a century

Bill Kemp

Historical archivist

McLean County Museum of History

In the late 19th and early 20th century, all-purpose community buildings were erected in towns all over Central Illinois. Although many of these often-elegant and always eminently practical structures — called halls or opera houses and usually privately developed — have fallen to the wrecking ball, there are a few survivors.

One of the finest remaining examples is the 97-year-old Mount Hope Township Community Hall.

Located in the village of McLean, at the corner of Morgan and Clinton streets off the town square, the handsome brick-and-stucco building has played host to innumerable club meetings, lectures, ice cream socials, public dances, movie nights, wedding receptions, family reunions, anniversaries and community celebrations. What's more, McLean High School did not see fit to build a gymnasium until 1950 because they could use the hall for basketball games, student plays and commencement ceremonies, and until 2002, the township library occupied the front end of the nearly century-old building.

The Mount Hope Township Community Hall (early on, it was sometimes called the McLean Community Hall and Library) rose phoenix-like from the ashes of a July 24, 1915, fire that claimed Columbian Hall, its 1892-1893 predecessor. Funds for the erection and operation of the older hall came from a community association that had raised \$4,000 through the issuance of 400 shares of stock.

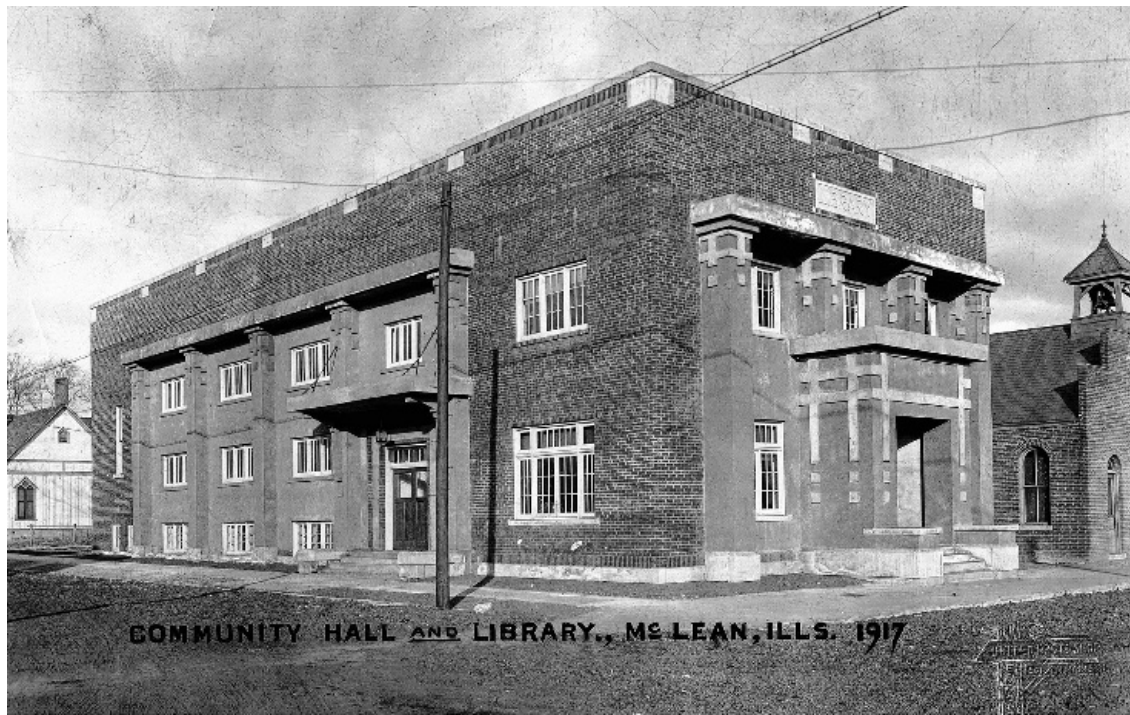
About a month after the fire, the association voted 233-54 to rebuild on the same site. New funds were raised by issuing an additional 500 shares of association stock, while three leading McLean citizens donated \$4,000 for the planned township library, which was to be housed in the building. All told, the new community hall cost around \$17,000, or more than \$300,000 in today's dollars.

The architect was Aaron Trabue (A.T.) Simmons of Bloomington, who specialized in public buildings, and has to his name more than 70 Carnegie libraries in 13 states. In Bloomington, his buildings include 207 East Washington St. (the redeveloped Paxton's building), the Castle Theater next door and the Lafayette Apartments.

The front third of the Prairie School-style community hall included a first floor library and clubrooms on the second floor above. The remaining two-thirds were mostly taken up by an auditorium/gymnasium featuring a stage and balcony, while the basement contained a dining hall, kitchen and a small township office.

Today the hall looks much like it did nearly a century ago. For instance, Simmons included a small room on the gymnasium balcony to hold a "moving picture machine." It's still there. Movies were shown on and off over the years, including the mid-1920s, when E.B. Noble rented the building for \$400 a year and charged admission for twice-a-week offerings.

The official opening came on Saturday, Dec. 1, with a program that ended with a dance into the midnight hour. "It is intended for use by any society, club or group of people for any purpose



Courtesy of the McLean County Museum

Walking into the Mount Hope Township Community Hall is like stepping back in time. For example, many of the hall's original 500 double-back wooden folding chairs are still in use today—nearly a century later!

of community benefit, and the association will rent it at a nominal price to pay expenses," noted The Pantagraph.

During the Great Depression, the hall association found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, the rental fees falling short of what was needed for taxes, utilities, insurance and upkeep. On March 24, 1939, a special meeting was held in which 769 shareholders voted unanimously to sell their building to Mount Hope Township for \$1. There was little grumbling, though, for as noted by The Pantagraph, stockholders had considered their investment more of a donation, and as a point of fact, the stock had never paid a dividend.

To its credit, Mount Hope Township has remained committed to the building ever since, though a little help has been welcome from time to time. In 1980, Linda "Linney" Benedict, president of the Ladies League of McLean, organized "Operation Facelift" to raise some \$40,000 for long-overdue renovations, with the replacement of the oil furnace used to heat the auditorium the number one priority.

In the spring of 2002, Mount Hope-Funks Grove Townships Public Library moved out of the old hall and into new quarters across the village square and the old library space is now a room commemorating McLean history. The Mount Township

Community Hall remains a cornerstone of social life in McLean as it's still used for weddings, anniversaries and other events, both public and private.

Back on Dec. 1, 1917, during the opening program, Dr. R.E. Hieronymus, a Mount Hope Township native and community advisor with the University of Illinois, spoke on how the new community hall embodied the ideals of small town neighborliness.

"Notice how many times 'our' is used this evening — not 'mine' or 'yours,' but 'ours,'" he said. "This is ours, and this will be more and more the place where the life of the community shall express itself in deeper ways."

## Who was Cesar Chavez? Most Mexicans not sure

Katherine Corcoran  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEXICO CITY — The title in Spanish of the new biopic movie about Cesar Chavez sums up just how little known the Mexican-American labor leader is in Mexico.

The movie that opened Thursday, Labor Day in Latin America, is called "The Mexican who defied the United States," with a subtitle that translates as "Who the hell is Cesar Chavez?"

That Chavez is barely known in Mexico shocks most Americans. That he was a U.S. civil rights hero with streets, schools, parks and a day in his honor surprises many Mexicans. Most of the moviegoers interviewed before an afternoon showing of film in Mexico City said they only knew about Chavez because of Mexican actor Diego Luna, who directed "Chavez" as his first English-language film.

"I only know he was an activist and I know it because I read about the movie," said Pedro Penaloza, 48, a sports coach.

The movie's producer, Pablo Cruz, said it was tricky coming up with a marketing strategy to draw a Mexican audience and admitted that license was taken with the title to do so. Chavez wasn't a Mexican citizen. He was born in Yuma, Arizona.

Cruz said at a Mexico City screening last week that the distributor Videocine came up with the idea of the Mexican who defied the U.S. "That's something that's very inherited somehow, the revenge system, even just in soccer or whatever," he said.

The movie, starring Mexican-American actor Michael Pena, portrays Chavez from his early organizing in the fields to his hunger strike, the grape boycott and eventual victory in getting growers to negotiate with farmworkers for better wages and working conditions. He died in California in 1993



Associated Press

Michael Pena as Cesar Chavez is seen in a scene from "Cesar Chavez." The movie that opened Thursday, Labor Day in Latin America, is titled "El Mexicano que desafio a los Estados Unidos," or "The Mexican who Defied the United States," with the subtitle "Who the hell is Cesar Chavez?"

at age 66.

Luna said he wanted to make the film because it's a shared history that people on both sides fail to recognize. Moviegoers at Mexico City's upscale Antara shopping center, where the screening occurred, are unfamiliar with the issues laborers face in U.S. fields. Mexican-Americans don't realize how much Mexico has changed.

"Michael Pena, when he first came to Sonora, he said, 'How strange. The most Mexican person here is me.' And he's from Chicago," Luna said. "He was thinking of the Mexico of his father in Purificacion, a small town in Jalisco ... and the world we're sitting in has nothing to do with the world he thought of as his father's."

"We can't allow that distance to exist ... like you see in the movie, we're much stronger as a united force." The movie's creators also know they have an uphill battle in selling a movie that portrays any union as a savior of exploited workers in a country where unions are generally considered corrupt. It also doesn't help that the movie had such low box office receipts in the United States after lukewarm reviews.

The film cost \$15 million to make, but has made under \$6 million so far since opening in the U.S.

"It's a really good movie," said homemaker Julieta Cabrera, 66. "I wish there were a man like him in Mexico right now because we're in the same bad situation. We need people as courageous as him to change things."

Dolores Huerta, co-organizer of the group that became the United Farm Workers of America, and who is played in the movie by Rosario Dawson, joked that people in Mexico think of the boxer, Julio Cesar Chavez, when they hear labor leader's name.

"In those days when we were organizing we didn't have the social media as we do right now, there wasn't as much interchange," she said at last week's screening in Mexico City.

## Space buffs are hoping to reawaken old NASA probe

Mark K. Matthews  
ORLANDO SENTINEL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When NASA launched a space-weather probe called ISEE-3 in 1978, Jimmy Carter was president, the Commodores' "Three Times a Lady" topped the charts and sci-fi fans had seen only one "Star Wars" movie: the original.

Thirty-six years and five "Star Wars" movies later, the NASA craft, unused by the agency since 1997, is again the talk of the space world.

A group of garage engineers — ranging from a 23-year-old former University of Central Florida student to an 81-year-old ex-NASA official — wants to get the bookshelf-sized probe working again when it whips by the moon this summer.

The aim is to restart its mission of monitoring space weather and — if the group can pull it off — send it to study an

incoming comet in 2018.

"This is something that has never been done before," said Robert Farquhar, a former NASA manager who worked with the spacecraft in the 1980s.

But waking a NASA probe in space for nearly four decades is no easy task. Not only do team members have to figure out how to "talk" to the spacecraft and give it commands, but they'll also have to do it without NASA funding.

NASA is helping the campaign by releasing related documents, but the cash-strapped agency isn't spending any money on the project. Dwayne Brown, a NASA spokesman, said in a statement that "re-contacting ISEE-3 would have little scientific value" for NASA.

Still, supporters argue that any new data could be helpful and that reviving the craft could help get the public excited about space. That's why the team

is trying to crowd-fund the project — having so far raised about 60 percent of the goal of \$125,000.

The "vast majority of the donations are \$10 or \$50, (but) pocket change in large numbers can turn into something," said Keith Cowing, editor of the NASAWatch website and one of the project's directors.

It's a strange new chapter for a spacecraft last seen on Earth on Aug. 12, 1978, the day NASA launched ISEE-3 from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station on a mission to study space weather.

NASA wanted to better understand solar wind and how it interacted with Earth's magnetic field, so ISEE-3 was dispatched to a stable orbit about 930,000 miles from Earth to take measurements. Equipped with instruments advanced for the time, ISEE-3 gathered data "at the rate of once every 40 minutes," according to NASA.

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This week	4.44	3.51	3.35	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>■ Up: 22%</p> <p>■ Down: 11%</p> <p>■ Unchanged: 67%</p> </div>			
Last Week	4.48	3.54	3.34				
Last Year	3.52	2.75	2.63				

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\$175,000	\$785.83	\$810.45	\$835.48	\$860.89	\$886.70	\$912.88	\$939.44	\$966.36	\$993.63
\$185,000	\$830.73	\$856.76	\$883.22	\$910.09	\$937.37	\$965.05	\$993.12	\$1,021.58	\$1,050.41
\$195,000	\$875.64	\$903.08	\$930.96	\$959.28	\$988.04	\$1,017.21	\$1,046.80	\$1,076.80	\$1,107.19
\$205,000	\$920.54	\$949.39	\$978.70	\$1,008.48	\$1,038.70	\$1,069.38	\$1,100.48	\$1,132.02	\$1,163.97

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