

United Automobile Workers Union Hall: Local No. 7
(Mission Evangelical Lutheran Church)
1551 Hart Street
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-316

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKERS UNION (UAW) HALL: LOCAL NO. 7

(MESSIAH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH)

HABS No. MI-316

Location: 1551 Hart Street
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

USGS Belle Isle, Michigan, Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: 17.338000.4692160

Last Owner
and Occupant: United Automobile Workers Union, Local No. 7

Significance: The building was constructed in 1914 as a combined school and assembly hall for the German-speaking Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church. Germans had concentrated in the East Side since the mid-19th century, and George W. Auch, the carpenter contractor for the structure, was a noted builder of Lutheran churches on the city's East Side. After Messiah Evangelical left in 1924, the building became a popular home for religious, veterans, and fraternal societies, particularly the International Order of Odd Fellows, the lodges of which often had among their members the kinds of skilled workers who led the unionization movement in the automobile industry in the 1930s. In 1937, Local No. 7 of the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW) acquired ownership of the property and converted the building into a union hall.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1914. Building permit #4702, October 8, 1914; cornerstone laid, November 15, 1914; building dedication, March 7, 1915. (Sources: City of Detroit Building Permits, Department of Building and Safety Engineering, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan; Robert E. Erickson, compiler, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Detroit and Vicinity [Detroit, 1919], p. 81.)
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Register of Deeds of Wayne County, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

Legal description of property: Lots 101, 102, and 103 of Block 1 of the Hart Farm Subdivision (P.C. 687).

- 1914 Deed, May 16, 1914, recorded in Liber 974, p. 564.
Elizabeth O'Neil
To
Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Congregation
Lot 101
- 1914 Deed, May 16, 1914, recorded in Liber 974, p. 562.
James A. O'Neil
To
Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Congregation
Lots 102 and 103
- 1924 Mortgage, January 24, 1924, recorded in Liber 1319, p. 150.
Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Congregation
To
Detroit Savings Bank
Lots 101, 102, and 103
Amount: \$15,000
- 1934 Sheriff's Deed, January 18, 1934, recorded in Liber 1963, p. 7.
Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Congregation
By Deputy Sheriff
To Detroit Savings Bank
Lots 101, 102, and 103

1937 Deed, December 29, 1937, recorded in Liber 4956,
p. 545.
Detroit Savings Bank
To
Auto Workers' Educational Society of Local No. 7
Lots 101, 102, and 103

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

- a. contractors: (source: Detroit Dispatch-Reporter,
November 13, 1914, p. 4).

Carpenter contractor: Winkler & Auch (source:
Building Permit #4702, October 8, 1914).
George W. Auch "erected many of the large buildings
on the East Side [of Detroit], particularly Lutheran
churches." (Source: Detroit News, February 22,
1937, in "George W. Auch," Reading Room File, Burton
Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library,
Detroit, Michigan). George Auch was born in 1867 in
Sebewaing, Michigan. He attended Addison College in
Addison, Illinois. Following graduation in 1893,
Auch moved to Detroit and worked for twelve years as
a teacher at Bethany Lutheran Parochial School. In
1905, Auch began his carpenter contracting company.
In the 1910s, he was active in public affairs.
He was twice the president of the Detroit Board of
Education, a school inspector and alderman from the
15th Ward, and a member of the Library Commission.
In 1930, Auch was elected president of the Builders
and Traders Exchange of Detroit. In 1937, he died
from injuries suffered in an automobile accident.
Funeral services for Auch were held at Messiah
Evangelical Lutheran church.

Mason, stone, and iron contractor: Alfred R. Yops

Heating and plumbing contractor: Detroit Plumbing &
Heating Co.

Lathing and plastering contractor: H.J. Barber

Painting contractor: W.H. Ferris

Glazing contractor: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co.

Electrical contractor: J. Simpson

Roofing & sheet metal contractor: Michigan Cornice &
Slate Co.

5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located. The original building permit (#4702, October 8, 1914) refers to a two-story, brick, church and school building, constructed at an estimated cost of \$14,000. The earliest group of photographs that have been found date from around the 1940s when the building was a functioning union hall. (Photographs located at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan). Three have been submitted with this report. Two exterior photographs (MI-316-16 and MI-316-17) show the building with probably the first sign of Local No. 7, UAW-CIO. A interior photographs (MI-316-18) shows the second-floor lobby area as it looked before the installation of panelling and a drop ceiling in 1956.

6. Alterations and additions:

- 1924 Conversion of building into a lodge and dance hall. (Building permit #13040-A, September 19, 1924; building permit no longer survives).
- 1937 Erection of fire escape at rear of building as means of egress from second floor. Estimated cost, \$500. (Building permit #58445, November 24, 1937).
- 1956 Installation of panelling and a lower ceiling on the second floor. Estimated cost, \$2,500. (Building permit #77635, July 6, 1956).

B. Historical Context:

Building at 1551 Hart was begun in late-1914 for the Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod). This largely German-speaking congregation first began in 1911 as the Fairview Lutheran Mission and operated out of a frame chapel which it had built at the corner of Kercheval and Hillger. Following the adoption of a constitution and the election of officers, it formally became a congregation on January 28, 1912. In these years Messiah Evangelical expanded both in function (it organized a parochial school and a Ladies' Aid Society) and in numbers of communicants (from 30 to 330 between 1912 and 1919). The original frame chapel soon became too small. Consequently, under the leadership of Reverend A.H.A. Loeber (a Milwaukee-born Lutheran minister who served the congregation for more than 60 years beginning in 1912), Messiah Evangelical in early 1914 decided to establish

new and larger quarters. It began by purchasing three empty lots on nearby Hart, just north of Jefferson Avenue. In October, 1914, the congregation let a contract for a new two-story building which temporarily combined both church and school functions. "The new edifice," according to the Detroit Dispatch-Reporter of November 13, 1914, "will in later years be used as a school only, but for the present it will be used as a church and school building." Construction was completed by the following Spring. The building featured two large classrooms and one smaller one on the second floor. The first-floor auditorium, which seated 250 to 300 persons, was "laid out in such a manner that the auditorium can, without much remodeling, be converted into two classrooms."

During the 1910s, the far east side riverfront area in which the Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church grew was one of the most important and dynamic industrial districts of Detroit. Known as Fairview Village, the area was undeveloped prior to its incorporation into Detroit in 1906. Between 1906 and 1916 the far east riverfront around Conner Creek rapidly developed. Automobile companies opened factories in the area, as did many important suppliers to the automobile industry. Later, in 1925, Chrysler Corporation acquired ownership of two of the district's most important factories: the Jefferson Avenue automobile assembly facility and the Kercheval Avenue body plant. Accompanying the concentration of industrial activities was a boom in residential construction. An area that had been empty of residences in 1906 was, by 1916, almost completely filled. In the midst of this rapidly changing urban environment, the members of Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church lived and worked. "The area was new," the Rev. A.H.A. Loeber later recalled. "A lot of homebuilding was going on and it was a fine area in which to work." Many of the men in his congregation probably worked as skilled tradesmen in the automobile industry, a likely course for working-class Germans and German-Americans.

In 1924, Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church moved into a new building further east in Detroit at the corner of Kercheval and Lakewood. However, Messiah Evangelical continued to own the building at 1551 Hart until the Detroit Savings Bank foreclosed on its mortgage in 1934. The religious use of the building did not altogether disappear after 1924. The Detroit city directory for 1937 shows occupancy by the Spiritualist Bible Church and the Church of Christ (Pentecostal). But after 1924 the principal occupants were various lodges of the International Order of Odd Fellows. Indeed, from 1934 to 1937 the building appears in city directories as the I.O.O.F. Hall. Commonly, skilled workers

of northern and western European descent belonged to Odd Fellows lodges. These same skilled workers provided the crucial local-level leadership that sustained the union organizing movement in the automobile industry in the 1930s.

At some point in 1937, Local 7 of the United Automobile Workers Union (CIO), representing workers at Chrysler Corporation's Jefferson Avenue and Kercheval Avenue plants, acquired ownership of 1551 Hart. UAW tradition commonly regards the building as the first hall actually owned by one of its local unions. On December 2, 1937, Auto Workers' Educational Society of Local 7 acquired title of the property, and the transaction officially was recorded with the Wayne County Register of Deeds on December 29th. But the Union likely owned the building before these dates. For example, building permit #58445, dated November 24, 1937, secured to construct a fire escape, gave the "U.A.W.A. Society," or Local 7, as the owner of the property.

The American automobile industry operated on a non-union basis from the early 1900s until the rise of the United Automobile Workers Union in the mid and late-1930s. Detroit was both the center of the American automobile industry and its employers were noted practitioners of the open-shop method of labor relations. General strikes by the UAW against General Motors and Chrysler in 1937, and Ford Motor Company in 1941, resulted in the unionization of the automobile industry and turned Detroit into a bastion of union strength. UAW Local 7, representing Chrysler workers, was integral to the transformation that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s in employment relations within American industry.

Local 7 originally was chartered by the American Federation of Labor on October 1, 1935, and represented workers at the Kercheval body plant. Another union, the Automotive Industrial Workers Association, represented workers across the street at the Jefferson Avenue plant. In 1936, Local 7 switched its allegiance to the new Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO) after industrial unions were expelled from the AFL. That summer, the former AFL federal union amalgamated with the A.I.W.A. to create a new UAW-CIO Local 7, with R.J. Thomas of the A.I.W.A. as the first local president. (R.J. Thomas served as UAW International President from 1939 to 1946). On March 8, 1937, Local 7 joined with other local unions in organizing sitdown strikes which closed all nine of Chrysler's plants in Detroit. This classic battle in American labor history, which spawned a wave of sitdown strikes in virtually every Detroit industry, ended with Chrysler conceding union recognition to the UAW-CIO on April 5th. It

was thus a militant and invigorated local union, with both support and money from a growing membership, which bought the Odd Fellows Hall at 1551 Hart in 1937.

UAW Local 7 maintained continuous ownership and use of 1551 Hart until July, 1988, when it moved into temporary quarters while awaiting the construction of a new union hall. The City of Detroit acquired the property and subsequently had the building demolished in order to clear space for the construction of a new Chrysler automobile assembly plant.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The architectural significance of this structure, which is rather plain in appearance, arises from its design and principle use as an assembly hall for relatively large groups of people, whether Sunday School pupils, church goers, lodge members, or union members. The symmetry of the structure, together with the inclusion of a decorative cornice and front entryway entablature, lend a classical architectural air to the building.
2. Condition of fabric: Exterior walls, windows, and roof are in good condition, as are interior spaces. The large first-floor assembly hall--the heart of the building's function--was refurbished and modernized in the mid-1980s.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This two and one-half story, symmetrical, T-shaped, building is 62' x 50' in overall size. The central section on the Hart facade (which contains a small fenestrated attic) is 28' across and extends 12' from the rest of the building. The building also features a full-size basement.
2. Foundations: Concrete basement floor; basement walls, 11" thick, are made of brick. Foundation walls rise about 5' above the grade and, on all facades except the rear, are topped with a course of raised brick set at a diagonal angle.

3. Wall construction: Exterior walls, 11" thick, consist of three layers of common brick. The brick is brown and laid in stretcher courses. Parapet walls with concrete coping surround all facades except the rear, as do courses of raised brick at foundation level and over the second-story windows. On the Hart facade, raised brick is used to frame windows and to create tall vertical sections on the central extension. Window sills throughout the building are made of a white-colored concrete mixture. The same concrete-mixture is used decoratively in the square motifs that appear on the Hart facade, in the two diamond and square-shaped blocks in which the date of construction appear, and in the rectangular block situated below the attic windows upon which "Messiah Ev. Luth. School" once was inscribed. A green-painted triglyph entablature made of sheet metal extends over front entrance, as does a white sign with red-lettering of UAW Local 7.
4. Structural system, framing: Exterior walls are brick, load-bearing. Two main wooden trusses give support to the roof. Support to the building also is given by two, 40' long, structural steel beams, each braced by two steel columns. This system is located beneath the floor on the first story and is visible in the basement.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The front entrance porch, which is enclosed and 6' x 5' in size, begins some 4' above grade. The porch floor consists of three steps and a landing which are made of concrete. The five steps and landing in the stairway below are 9' 6" wide. Badly rusted iron railings flank each side of the stairway. Entrance to the doors at the rear of the building is by way of a wooden platform for the first story, and a steel fire escape for the second story.
6. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys are located at the rear of the building. One serves the kitchen area in the basement; the other rises from the boiler room.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The building has four doorways, the main entrance on the front and three on the back (serving basement, first floor, and second floor). The rear doors are made of steel; those on the first and second stories are framed by wood and glass panels covered by steel bars. The front entrance is guarded by a sliding steel gate, and entry to the building itself is by way of two plain wooden doors.

- b. Windows and shutters: Windows appear on all facades and at all levels of the building. Those on the basement and first-story are protected by steel bars. The standard double-hung sash window measures 3'x 4' and appear on the principal facades in groups of two or three. In the window section above the front entrance only the bottom row slide open. Window frames and mullions throughout the building are made of green-painted wood, and window sills are trimmed with concrete. First-story windows on the rear of the building were closed with brick at some point in the history of the structure. The recessed brick window section on the first floor of the south facade, however, probably never had windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is flat and covered by tar over paper and wood.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The projecting, plain, and unbracketed cornice is made of green-painted sheet metal and decorates only the Hart facade. A gutter system, with two downspouts, is located on the rear of the building.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: See sketch plan, page 17.
- b. First floor: The key feature is the 56' x 33' auditorium, located directly across from the front entrance.
- c. Second floor: See sketch plan, page 18.
- d. Attic: It measures 26'x 6' and is located within the extension from the Hart facade.

2. Stairways: The building has three stairways--from the basement to the first floor, from the first floor to the second, and from the second to the attic. The first two of these stairways are fairly wide (5 feet) in order to accommodate the movement of a large number of people. Stairways are located within the extended section on the front of the building.

3. Flooring: Tile squares and sheets cover concrete in the basement, and cover plywood floors on the first and second stories. Colors include brown in the basement, white in the first-floor auditorium, and green on the second floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Green-painted brick appears on the walls in the basement bar area, with white plaster on the ceiling. The first-story auditorium has light brown floor-to-ceiling paneling and a drop ceiling. Light-brown paneling with wildlife scenes appears behind the speaker's platform, and it adorns the platform (see photograph MI-11). The second floor has yellowish-brown paneling and a drop ceiling; both of these were installed in 1956.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Entrance to the auditorium is by way of two doors which, together, measure 5'5" in width. No doors bar entrance to the second-floor lobby; the entryway spans 5'9" in width. Office doorways on the second floor are 3' across. Interior doors and door frames throughout the building are made of wood and are plain in appearance.
 - b. Windows: Wooden window frames are plain in appearance. Windows provide natural lighting in the attic and on the second floor, especially in the secretarial workspace located in the southern side of the building. Two groups of windows along the east side of the first-floor auditorium bring in natural light. However, light from the two groups of windows on the south side of the auditorium, behind the speaker's platform, have been blocked by paneling.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating and air conditioning: Heating throughout the building is by way of radiators. The boiler room in the basement features a "Kewanee Type R" boiler. It is powered by natural gas and was manufactured in 1949 by the Kewanee Boiler Corporation of Kewanee, Illinois. (Source: State of Michigan, Department of Labor--Boiler Division, Certificate of Steam Boiler Inspection, #63127 of March 23, 1962; located on wall of boiler room). A hot-water heater and incinerator are also located in the boiler room. The only air conditioning in the building is in the secretarial workspace on the second floor and by means of individual window units.

- b. Lighting: Original lighting fixtures no longer exist. Generally, florescent lighting is used throughout the structure. The auditorium has several spotlights located both at the rear and front of the room.
- c. Cooking apparatus: The basement kitchen has a Garland stove manufactured by the Detroit-Michigan Stove Company. The stove has ten burners and two ovens, and is powered by natural gas. (See photograph MI-316 - 10).

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The structure is located on the west side of Hart and north of East Jefferson Avenue. Due to the orientation of streets in Detroit south of Six Mile Road, the structure at 1551 Hart actually faces east northeast. The terrain in the area is flat. However, the urban context of the building no longer existed by the summer of 1988 due to the condemnation and demolition of surrounding residences and commercial structures (see photograph MI-316-4). The grade surrounding the building is built up above the level of the sidewalk. Well-trimmed grass and shrubbery appear in front of the building, and a gravel parking lot on the south side. View of the lower part of the north side of the building is blocked by an unkept row of trees. The space between the rear of the building and the alley is filled in with weeds.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Historic views: Collection of photographs of UAW Local 7 at Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. *SEE FIELD NOTES

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Detroit, City of. Building Permits. Department of Building and Safety Engineering. City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

Wayne County, Register of Deeds. Land Tract Index, Book No. 858. City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared in June-August, 1988, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Detroit, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, and Chrysler Corporation as a mitigative measure prior to the demolition of the building. The building is to be demolished as part of the New Chrysler City Project.

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Date: August 12, 1988