

Silverhill residents work to save Little Hall

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By



The Little Hall in Silverhill was damaged by a tornado in March. Residents are working to restore and move the 91-year-old building. (Guy Busby/Press-Register)

SILVERHILL, Alabama -- Frank Kucera stood in the silent interior of the **Little Hall** on Friday and remembered going to dances there in the 1950s. "They had square dances. You could polka if you wanted, or waltz. That was all before Elvis,"

he said.

Years earlier, he said, his parents held their wedding reception in the same room.

"There are a lot of memories in this place," Kucera added.

Now, the hardwood floor bends in the center, and the leaning north wall is separated from the ceiling. In March, a tornado that rumbled through town shoved the 91-year-old Little Hall 21 feet off its foundation.

Now, the hall stands within 6 feet of the fence around the town water tower. Another storm could send it into the tower and damage the Silverhill water system, according to reports from insurance adjusters who have recommended that the hall be demolished.

Kucera and others, however, are campaigning to save the beloved Little Hall, and move it to Paul Anderson Park, across Ala. 104 from Silverhill Town Hall.

"If the good Lord wanted this building gone, he had the perfect chance to do it," Kucera said.

"This is a tough old building. It's survived two moves and now this, and we're not going to let it be lost now."

The committee set up to save the hall has raised about \$13,000 so far, members said. Also, the town has agreed to provide about \$18,000 earmarked for demolition to help with the move.

More fundraising efforts are being arranged for 2012.

The move itself will cost \$18,800, while \$8,500 will be needed to remove and replace the roof so that Little Hall can fit under utility lines.

The price tag for restoration isn't yet known. Kucera said that some estimates come in at about \$25,000, but much depends on a structural examination after the move.

Little Hall supporters said a fund has been set up at Union Bank in Silverhill, and donations can be mailed to Save The Little Hall at P.O. Box 309, Silverhill, AL. 36576. Donations can also be dropped off at Town Hall.

Little Hall was built in 1920 as a school for the children of Czech families in the area, according to local histories. The road to the original site is still known as Bohemian Hall Road.

In 1978, it was moved to the campus of Silverhill School, where it served as a band room and assembly hall. When the school needed land for a new gymnasium, the hall was sold to the town for \$1 and moved to its location near the water tower in the 1980s.

Jennifer Fidler grew up near the hall, and it holds a warm place in her memories.

Fidler, now Fairhope public works director, said that the hall sat next to land owned by her family. She recalled a cousin's wedding being held there in the 1970s, after a rainstorm halted plans for an outdoor event.

"Some of the wood for this came from my grandfather's property," she said. "It's part of our heritage."