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MESA HISTORY

How Mesa Community College got its start

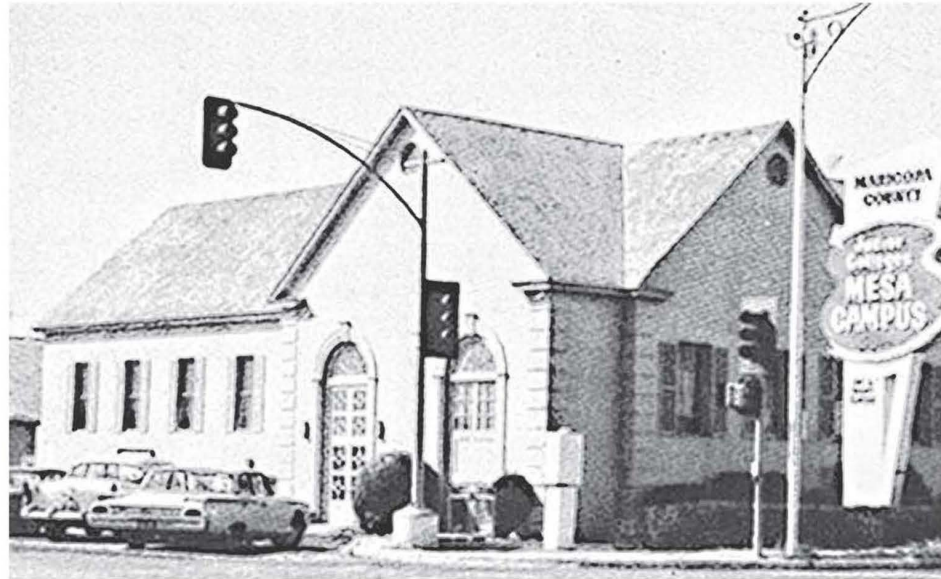
JAY MARK
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

1965 — the mid-point of the turbulent Sixties.

It was the year the U.S. sent the first combat troops to Vietnam. Dr. Martin Luther King was arrested during the Selma, Ala., Civil Rights march.

The L.A. Dodgers edged out the Minnesota Twins in the World Series. The film version of "The Sound of Music" premiered to great acclaim.

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The old Alma Ward Meeting House (now the Landmark Restaurant) at Main and Extension was one of the first locations for classes of what would become Mesa Community College. MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

College

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Closer to home, Mesa was witnessing a population explosion to nearly 50,000 — up from just 17,000 fifteen years earlier.

That dramatic growth earned the city its own junior college.

The story really begins in November 1962 with the creation of the Maricopa County Junior College District, and the decision to establish Phoenix College extension campuses.

Three hundred thirty students registered for the first classes held in various rented locations — "...a bowling alley, a funeral parlor, a basketball emporium, and an old church."

Because it was the largest facility, the old Alma Ward meetinghouse, constructed on the southwest corner of Main Street and Extension, about 1908 with locally made brick, became the headquarters for the fledgling Maricopa County Junior Colleges Mesa Campus.

Today, the historic church is home to the Landmark Restaurant. For the three years the college was there, the present day elegant dining room with its white table clothes was the school's library. Classes were held in the basement and portable buildings brought to the site.

The inefficiency of holding classes in scattered locations around town led the governing board to pursue space for a 160-acre campus that would equally serve residents of Mesa, Tempe and Chandler.

Dwight Patterson, of Cactus League and Hohokams renown, was a member of the governing board. He was also a friend of the pioneering farming and ranching Dobson family, which, since the 1880s, had amassed thousands of acres in south Mesa and Chandler.

Patterson persuaded the Dobsons to sell a quarter section of their farmland on the southeast corner of Southern and Dobson (the street named for them). Asking price was about \$3,000 per acre.

On April 12, 1965, with plans for a new campus underway, the Governing Board officially renamed the school Mesa Com-

munity College.

Classes continued in the downtown area until new campus opened for the 1966 fall semester with 26 portable classrooms and three completed structures — science center, student center and a maintenance building.

From its founding as an Extension of Phoenix College, MCC enrollment has grown from a modest 330 (about the same combined number of students at the three recently opened universities in Mesa) to nearly 23,000.

The world has changed in the 50 years since the "country" campus opened amidst farm fields. Many of its students have gone on to successful careers.

That's why MCC is going all out on its 50th birthday — two days of celebration — April 8 and 10. And everyone is invited to a plethora of free activities.

Find all the details at <http://www.mesacc.edu/50/events/birthday>.

Reach historian Jay Mark with questions or story ideas at jaymark@twtdbooks.com.