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Cornerstone of history

The cornerstone of Academic Hall, Mizzou's first building, moves from exposed to protected.

Story by John Beahler • Photos by Rob Hill

For a university as old and tradition-bound as Mizzou, there are historical icons on every corner of campus. The Columns on Francis Quadrangle are probably the most recognizable,

but you can hardly turn around without bumping into relics and remnants that are reminders of MU's historical status as the oldest public university west of the Mississippi River. There is Memorial Union's Gothic revival tower, the century-old limestone buildings of the White Campus and Thomas Jefferson's original tombstone in a pocket park bordering the Quad.

One of Mizzou's oldest treasures has been hiding in plain sight for more than 90 years. The original cornerstone from old Academic Hall, the university's first building, which burned in 1892, was saved from the ashes. The cornerstone was first laid during an elaborate Fourth of July ceremony in 1840. In 1915 it was mortared into place

in the memorial gate at Eighth and Elm streets that form the north entry to Francis Quadrangle.

Now, the venerable icon is moving again. Last fall, a crew from Mid-Continental Restoration Co. of Fort Scott, Kan., cut the stone out of the surrounding structure, loaded it onto a pallet and hauled it away on a front-end loader. The move is expected to be complete by next spring, when it takes up residence in its new home in the rotunda of Jesse Hall.

By the time of its most recent move, the stone had settled into obscurity. It was located at the very bottom of the west gate, and visitors had to crouch to read the faded inscription. As the roadway was built up over the years, paving material covered the first few inches of the stone.

That obscurity bothered Tom Schultz, BJ '56, a longtime MU development director and Mizzou Alumni Association leader. Schultz helped engineer the cornerstone's move. He estimates it will cost about \$30,000, with the entire amount coming from private donations.

"The cornerstone is a very important part

'It's about more than just these objects themselves. Nearly 170 years ago, the people of Missouri said, "Let's build a great university.'" — Tom Schultz

of our university's history," Schultz says. "We want to make sure we preserve it for future generations. Now, with the help of some very generous donations, it will be restored and become the centerpiece of an educational display showcasing MU's history."

The cornerstone will have a place of honor in Jesse Hall, where it will face the Columns. A surrounding display will tell the story of the original Academic Hall, the 1892 fire and the Columns. Design for the display will be decided in a contest for students in the architectural studies program in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. A formal dedication is planned for fall 2010.

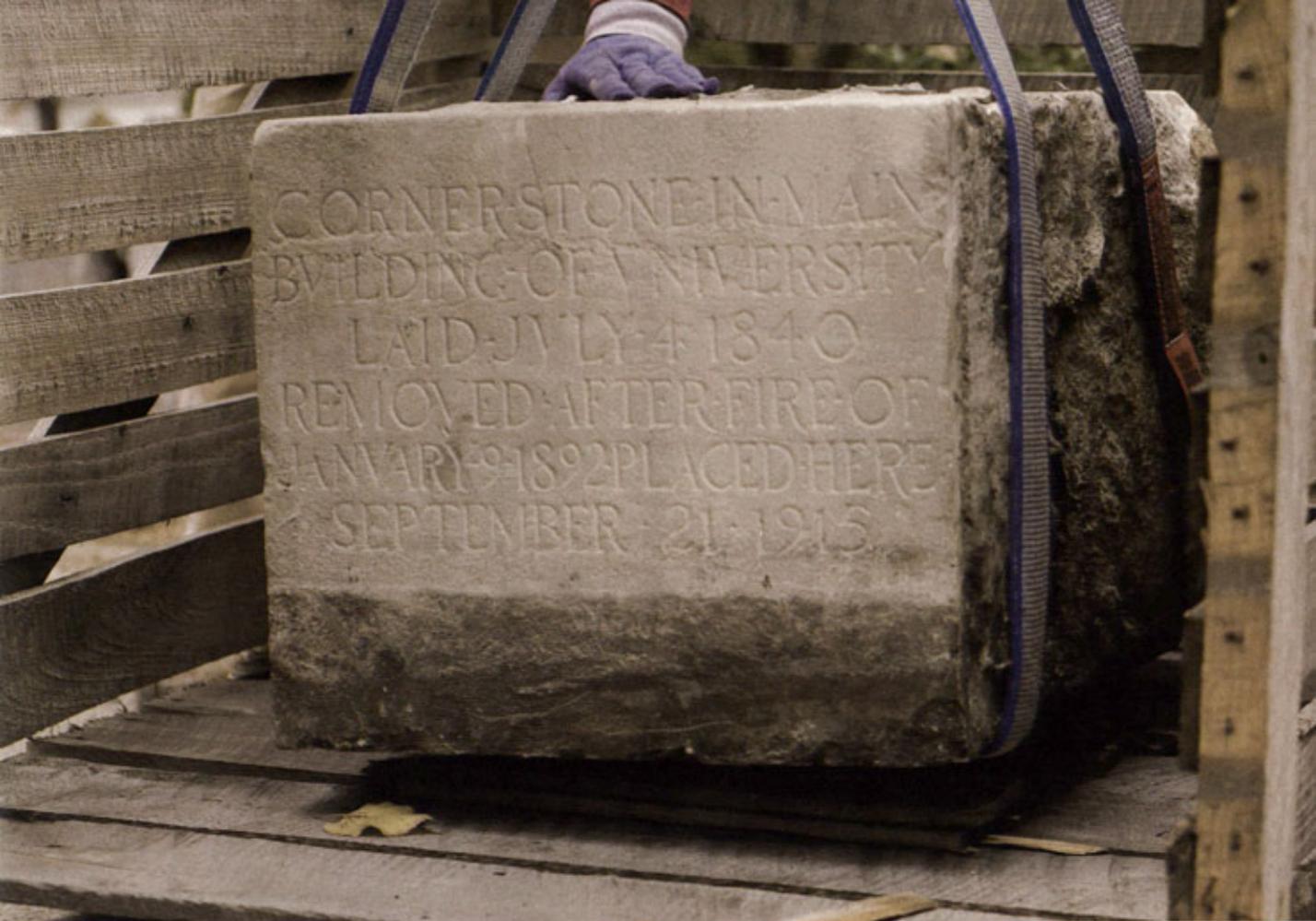
According to a centennial history of the



A plaster bas-relief cast of the July 4, 1840, laying of the Academic Hall cornerstone is on display in Jesse Hall. The stone original rests in the Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City, Mo.



John Kruger, left, of Mid-Continental Restoration Co. of Ft. Scott, Kan., and Ed Drane, contract manager for MU Planning and Design and Construction, slide a wooden pallet under the suspended cornerstone. It was removed from the gate and will be relocated in Jesse Hall.



university written by former MU history Professor Jonas Viles, the memorial gates were built in 1915 using some of the \$3,383 that Mizzou received from the federal government in reparation for damages caused by Union soldiers who occupied the university during the Civil War.

Federal troops were garrisoned in Academic Hall during 1862. Viles' book documents a report from that time which said that soldiers had used virtually every room in the building. They broke or stole all the chemistry lab equipment. They looted carpets, building fixtures and hundreds of library books. One room was used as a military prison and "had little left but floor and walls," the report said.

William Switzler, a 19th century Columbia newspaper editor and a member of the board of curators, described the 1840 cornerstone ceremony in his *History of Boone County*. Artifacts placed in the stone included coins, a copy of the university

charter and newspapers from the time.

Why go to all the trouble to save the cornerstone? Because artifacts like the old stone give us a flavor of the university and how things have changed over the years, Schultz says.

"It's about more than just these objects themselves," he says. "Nearly 170 years ago, the people of Missouri said, 'Let's build a great university.' It's the vision of the university that's projected. Don't you think that's what makes us a great university, that we have all this tradition?" ■

Top: Stains from an old asphalt layer mar the Academic Hall cornerstone, which was removed from its former home at the base of Memorial Gate north of Francis Quadrangle.

Right: Tom Schultz, BJ '56, led the effort to move the cornerstone to Jesse Hall. Students in an Architectural Studies studio taught by So-Yeon Yoon competed to design a display to house the cornerstone.



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