

Ice, Wind & Fire

BY JOHN BEAHLER

FRANCIS QUADRANGLE SEEMS SO AGELESS THAT IT'S
SOMETIMES HARD TO REMEMBER THAT THIS QUIET OASIS IN
THE CENTER OF CAMPUS HAS JUST BARELY BEGUN ITS
SECOND CENTURY.

HUMAN HANDS PILED UP STURDY red brick and measured and mortared them into the buildings that line the Quad, but nature has been a partner in the creation. In a way, the Quad is very much a natural phenomenon forged by fire and ice, wind and time.

Fire? Sure, the blaze that gutted regal old Academic Hall left six limestone Columns behind as tombstones. Wind has taken its toll on Quad buildings as well. A tornado in 1931 snatched away the witch's hat roof on one of Swallow Hall's two round towers. Rather than rebuild, it made more sense to remove the roof on the other tower, leaving Swallow with a fortress-like look. Another windstorm sheared off the statues that once lined the north roof of Jesse Hall.

How has ice played a role? Well, anyone who's seen a genuine Missouri ice storm knows how much power it packs. That's what happened 50 years ago, and it gave the Quad its modern face—with rows of stately pin oak trees that have shaded generations of Mizzou students.

That giant ice storm of 1949 kind of sneaked in. Freezing drizzle started Jan. 9, and by the next day—a Monday—there was a half-inch of ice everywhere. The drizzle kept coming. Tree branches bent and then snapped. Ice-coated electric and telephone wires broke under the weight. Streets were impassable, covered with ice and blockaded by downed branches and live power lines.

Almost a week later, Columbia and mid-Missouri were still cut off from the rest of the world. Ham radio volunteers replaced telephone and telegraph for emergency messages. Mizzou students still skittered to class on icy pathways, but most of the campus and town went without light and heat. The University provided special lighted and heated study areas; after all, final exams were coming up.



1949

STAFF PHOTO

The ferocious ice storm of January 1949 disrupted life on campus for weeks. The ice not only shattered elm trees lining Francis Quadrangle, but also prompted a rejuvenation in the spring, when the pin oak trees that currently shade walkways on the Quad were planted.



2000

PHOTO BY STEVE MORSE

Students and faculty stood fire watch on campus. Local stores sold out of portable heaters, stoves, flashlights and candles. Desperate homeowners even bought spools of electric wire to splice into the homes of neighbors who still had power.

The Quad was an absolute mess; people still remember that it looked like a tornado had touched down. The University turned to its new landscape architect, Willard Summers, BS Ag '43, to set things straight. "It was pretty," Summers says of the ice-dazzled scene, "but there wasn't much to save. We got crews out early and cut paths through the trees that were down." That spring the crews cleared out the shattered elm trees and replaced them with pin oaks. Those saplings were less than 10 feet tall when they were planted; today they tower more than 60 feet above the Quad's lawn.

In a very real sense, Francis Quadrangle is Mizzou's front yard. It's always been the border where town meets gown. Almost from the beginning of the University it's been the site for campus happenings: May Day ceremonies, graduation processions, ROTC parades, St. Patrick's Day shenanigans from the engineers, and peace demonstrations during the Vietnam War era. Maybe it's that sense of history that makes the Quad a

As the campus landscape architect in the late 1940s, Willard Summers helped clear away the ice storm's damage. Summers later spearheaded some of the first campus beautification efforts.

favorite spot for alumni to reminisce about old college days when they return for a visit. The Quad has seen it all.

Federal troops bivouacked on the lawn during the Civil War. Perturbed by all the pigs that roved through his campsite, the Union commander banned pigs from the University grounds in a proclamation with this stern warning: "Any hogs so found will be shot."

Where the School of Journalism stands now was once a shallow, muddy pond charitably called Lake St. Mary. On many a Halloween night, students spirited away the ceremonial cannons from Academic Hall and rolled them into the lake.

It was also a favorite hangout for Eugene Field in the 1870s. Before he made a name for himself as a newspaperman and children's poet, Field was a half-hearted student at Mizzou for two years. He loved to drift in a rowboat on Lake St. Mary, strumming a ukulele and singing outlandish songs that poked fun at the administration. The lake was filled in during the 1880s, when massive additions were made to Academic Hall.

As the University's landscape architect for a quarter century, Summers faced his share of battles around the Quad. Disease did in several of the original oak trees, and they had to be replaced. Once, chainsaw-toting vandals even toppled one of the oaks. "We never knew what the reason was. They just came in and cut it down," Summers recalls.

Don't worry, the Quad gets its share of horticultural TLC. And the giant pin oaks aren't left to fend for themselves.

"We baby-sit those trees; we really do," says Tom Flood, MU's current land-

scape and grounds superintendent. His crew prunes the old giants religiously to keep diseases at bay. They've done treatments to adjust soil acidity. They even drill holes in the ground and pump in a long-term iron supplement to battle nutrient deficiencies—something like a vitamin pill for trees. The Quad's new irrigation system provides a steady water supply and protects the trees and grass from drought stress.

"A few of the trees are struggling," Flood says. "The biggest problem with those trees is where they're planted and the soil. Some of the soil is pretty good, but a lot of it is just a skin of dirt over mountains of bricks from Academic Hall. We have utilities under the sidewalk on

both sides of the Quad, so the roots don't penetrate very far that way; their root structure is lopsided."

The old trees aren't in any immediate danger, though. "There's no reason a pin oak can't last another 30, 40, maybe 50 years," Flood says. There are no plans to plant a new row of oaks inside the older trees, because that would force the new to compete with the old.

"Which means we would be contributing to the demise of the big trees," Flood says. "The Quad is such a traditional, ceremonial space. It may not be the center of campus, but it's the heart of campus. We don't want to do anything to harm that. The place evokes very powerful images and memories." ❁



The Memorial Union tower is monumental, but not indestructible. A tornado in August 1981 shattered some of the tower's stonework. It was a repeat of September 1931, when a twister blew down stone railings and one of the spires. And yes, lightning does strike the same place twice. Lightning knocked the top off a spire in August 1933, and then in 1935 blasted a 10-foot crack in the stonework. Lightning rods were installed later that year.

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