A lone landmark on the northwest corner of what would become Francis Quadrangle, Switzler Hall looks over Columbia from a low rise in 1882. Built in 1871, and initially named Scientific Hall, it has housed the schools of journalism, agriculture and most recently the communication department.

SWITZLER REINVENTED

Oldest academic building on campus gets makeover
Story by Rob Hill

FOR THOSE WHO STUDIED, taught and toiled there, the creaking floors gave the place away — not to mention a vertigo-inducing back stairway and 90-plus windows, each eight feet tall, filtering light everywhere and radiating cold and heat through office and classroom alike.
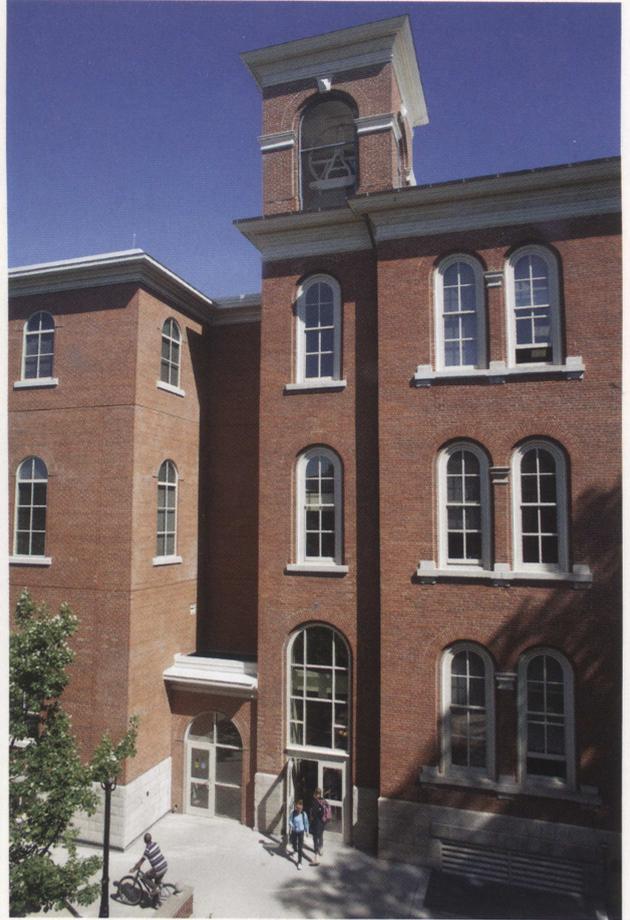
When Switzler Hall reopened for classes in August 2011, the venerable landmark on Francis Quadrangle became notable as both the oldest classroom building and the newest classrooms on campus. Sunlight continues to stream in, but modern safety features, centralized climate systems and numerous electrical outlets have brought Switzler into the 21st century.

New techniques in construction management and planning turned Switzler and the nearby Tate Hall into MU models for renovating with a shortened time frame. Architectural plans, simple building materials, and closer coordination between architect, contractor and engineers streamlined the process. New mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems made two historic buildings into new and efficient learning spaces.

Switzler's makeover was all the more impressive since the distinctive brick structure was a landmark, and the need for more space required an architecturally sensitive addition.

Above: Switzler Hall's bell has tolled for decades, first to summon students to class and today as a memorial for members of the university family as well as special events such as Tap Day and commencement.
University Archives photo c: 0/47/3

As crews removed the old interior floors and supports, intricate systems of tension rods and cables stabilized the brick shell as a concrete frame, and floors were built within.

Even the bell in Switzler's Tower, originally rung by hand to signal class changes, has received an update. More recently, an electromagnetic coil powered the clapper to strike, but that system failed last year. The technical services staff in the College of Engineering created a one-of-a-kind coil assembly. Updated computer hardware and software allows Switzler's bell to be rung via Ethernet connection from Jesse Hall. ▌▐

Top left: In 2010-11, renovations reduced Switzler Hall to a four-story brick shell, and then transformed it into a 21st century classroom building with 21 faculty offices, restrooms on all floors, and conference space. Steel and cable supports kept masonry walls stable as workers built concrete floors within.

Top right: A blend of old and new meet at the bell tower on the south façade of Switzler.

Left: Relegated to the work yard during renovation, cast iron columns that supported floor joists, above left, were reconditioned and painted as decorative details in the new lobby.
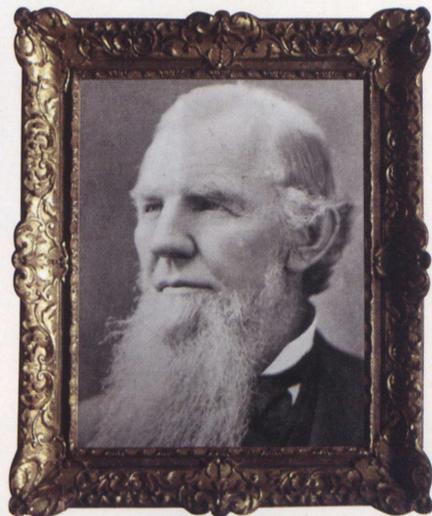
Far left: Remnants of a brick silo in the center of the building made way for more classroom space.

Journalism students work in a classroom circa 1911.

Professor Rebecca Meisenbach works with students in 207 Switzler, a modern wired, lighted and climate-controlled classroom. An original exterior brick wall hints at the building's historical roots.

In 1909, the hall was named for William F. Switzler, a Columbia journalist, state representative and member of the University of Missouri Board of Curators.