



Matt Campbell photo

The ramshackle Shack, a Campus hangout since 1921, is consumed by fire Nov. 1. Arson is suspected.

Flames spark SHACK memories

By KAREN WORLEY

Cartoonist Mort Walker, AB '48, creator of the comic strip "Beetle Bailey," joked the Shack could never burn because its wood was too soaked with beer.

"Once we tried to carve our initials in the ceiling with a cigarette lighter, but it wouldn't burn," says Walker of Stamford, Conn. The Shack was the place where Walker began his sketchings.

But burn it did. The Shack's colorful past met with a fiery finish in the early morning of Nov. 1, 1988. About 200 students, some in Halloween costumes, gathered to watch the fire that consumed the Campus snack bar and watering hole at 704 Conley Ave., across from Jesse Hall. Arson is suspected. Before the fire, the Shack was scheduled to be torn down to make way for a new Alumni Center (see accompanying story).

The Shack's heyday spanned the 1920s to 1960s. In the early years, it was a place where students drank

Mort Walker's first "Beetle Bailey" comic strip shows his characters in the Shack.



Columbo Missourian file

Students enjoy the Shack's atmosphere, whether eating in or dining out in the mid-70s.



Bruce Eising photo

nickel beer and "jellied," a term for getting together and drinking sodas so slowly they turned to jelly.

Because of rationing during World War II, only cheese, salami and braunschweiger sandwiches on thin rye bread were served, along with 10- to 12-cent beers.

"Beer got scarce," says John Blakemore, son of Mary and the late Vernon "Vern" Blakemore who managed the Shack from 1935 to the early '60s. "During the war years, you couldn't get meat or all the beer you could sell so you'd cut back hours. If you got five to 10 cases [of beer] a week, you'd be doing good."

To avoid selling out of beer, Vern Blakemore found a plentiful supply of bock beer from a St. Charles, Mo., brewery. The students didn't like the taste, but they drank it. "It was rough to drink, but we made the effort," Walker says.

Students, then as now, were price sensitive. "When beer prices went up,

the kids didn't like it," says John Blakemore, supervisor of faculty and staff benefits at Mizzou. His father would "break a dollar for a penny." In retrospect, he muses, "Dad might have been smarter to buy a new set of smaller glasses."

The Shack's food was popular. Instead of calling out for pizza, students from previous decades called in their orders for Shackburgers, famous for their barbecue-sauce topping. "It was nothing to get a 50 or 75 order from a fraternity or sorority," especially after curfew, John Blakemore says. "Some with onion, some without, some with sauce, some without."

Starting in the late '60s, students' lifestyles changed, as did their favorite eating and drinking haunts. Before that time, students boarded in houses on Campus and took three meals a day at nearby restaurants, diners and snack bars. In more recent years, with

relaxed University rules, many students live off Campus.

"The heyday was not while I was there," says Paul Peters, who attended MU from 1967 to 1971 and was Missouri Students Association president in 1970-71. Still, for on-foot freshmen, the Shack was the place students discovered on their first night in Collegetown USA, he says.

Day or night, "It was terribly dark in there," recalls Peters, BS PA '71, president of a consumer electronics accessory manufacturer in Nashua, N.H. General grubbiness was its theme. "It stunk. It was dark. It was miserable," the cartoonist Walker says. "It's just the kind of place students love."

Most of the time, the food preparation area met city health codes. However, the floors, walls and ceiling of the dining area were "never totally in compliance," says Ron Blumer of the Columbia Health De-

partment. The ceiling was only 6 feet high in some places and the floor and walls had see-through cracks. Old boards were patched together with the roof slanting in different directions. But students liked its plain, scuff-proof nature and bare bulbs screwed into ceiling sockets.

The Shack's interior included a truck that Chandler Davis drove to Columbia from San Diego in 1921. He parked the truck camper across from Jesse Hall and sold sandwiches to students.

In 1928, the sandwich shop became the Davis Tea Room, serving a T-bone and potato dinner for 75 cents, hot tamales for 15 cents and egg foo yong for 50 cents. Fast food was not in vogue. The menu read, "It takes time to prepare food properly. Please give us time. Then, if for any reason it isn't good, don't pay for it." A waiter named Joe Hook made \$7.50 a week and free meals plus pennies as tips. A 10-foot west wing was added to the building in 1923 and a 20- to 25-foot east wing in 1924. The tea room reached its peak in 1928.

In the early 1930s, it became Jack's Shack and the house specialty became Shackburgers. Following Prohibition, the introduction of 3.2 percent beer took the emphasis away from food and made the Shack a beer joint. During Jack Arnel's ownership, carving initials on the walls and tables became popular.

Joe Pollack, BJ '52, columnist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, called it "the ultimate cheap beer joint" in a Nov. 6, 1988, column. "Tables, benches and walls were scarred with initials, names, hearts, slogans and other emblems, and the carving was so uneven that it was impossible to write at a table there, because the pencil ripped right through the paper at about every third word."

In the late '40s, cartoonist Walker held editorial meetings for the student humor magazine, *Showme*, in a back room around a table that would seat eight. In addition to meetings, *Showme* staffers would conduct interviews, work on cartoon ideas and do some drawing there. Says fellow *Showme* staffer Bill Gabriel, BJ '50, of Solana Beach, Calif., in a 1979 *Columbia Daily Tribune* story, "The more beer we drank, the better our ideas got."

Joe and Alberta "Bert" Franke of Columbia bought the Shack in 1964.

The Shack was shut down in the late '60s, reopened in 1974 and closed its green door for good in May 1984. The Frankes, also owners of Campus Jewelers and Campus Beauty Shop since 1949, sold the Shack, plus five other business properties, a house and a parking lot, to the University in January 1988 for a package price of \$750,000.

In four years' time, vandals "broke in 20 some times after I closed it," Joe Franke says. He has stored, at an undisclosed location, a few Walker original cartoons, table tops and the original green door. Vandals made off with a replacement door Franke had hung earlier.

Students in the '50s played a song called *Green Door* on the Shack's juke box. Recorded by Jim Lowe, AB '48, the song mentions a mysterious door behind which some unknown pleasures regularly took place. The song never told what. The legend in 1956 and 1957 was that since Jim Lowe had been a student at the University, he had written it about the green door hinged to the Shack.

"Students wanted it to be the Shack behind the Green Door," says Lowe of the song, which sold 2½ million copies. Another legend is that a house of prostitution called the Green Doors existed in downtown Columbia at one time.

"I hate to kill this old legend," says Lowe, who had a daily radio show on WCBS and CBS Radio Network in New York for 30 years. "To my knowledge, Marvin Moore [who wrote the lyrics] of Dallas didn't have the Shack in mind when he wrote *Green Door*. He never set foot in Columbia." Rather, Lowe remembers the Green Door referring to a private club in Dallas.

Some alumni recall the Shack with romance; many a marriage proposal was tendered there. Others remember rowdy playfulness; the beer was cold and cheap. Some patrons tantalized their taste buds and still others recall the place with distaste.

For those who loved the Shack, its demise was "like losing an old friend," says Joe Franke.

"I guess that's the way to go out if you want to go out . . . spectacularly," Walker says. "One more flame . . . one more burst of glory." □

Plans build for center

The Shack's spirit of congeniality will be captured in some way in the new Don W. Reynolds Alumni Center.

Former Shack owner Joe Franke essentially gutted the inside of the building before the fire. The artifacts are stored at an undisclosed location for safe keeping. "Joe offered to give us the contents," says Kee Groshong, vice chancellor for administrative services.

Perhaps the Shack memorabilia will be displayed in the visitors' center, the lobby or alumni library of the new center, says Roger Gafke, BJ '61, MA '62, vice chancellor for development, university and alumni relations.

The center, to be built where the Shack stood, was made possible by a \$9 million gift from Reynolds, BJ '27, chairman of the board, chief executive officer and founder of the Donrey Media Group. Groundbreaking will occur in late 1989, with completion in 1991 or 1992.

The executive committee of the Alumni Association national board chose Patty Berkebile Nelson Immenschuh Architects Inc. of Kansas City at its Jan. 14 meeting. The Board of Curators approved the PBNI selection Jan. 27. Among the firm's completed projects are One Kansas City Place, the tallest building in the state; the Harry S. Truman State Office Building in Jefferson City, and closer to home, Gannett Hall, the newest addition to the Journalism School at MU. Tom Nelson, a KU graduate, will function as project manager and project designer while David Immenschuh will be the interior designer. Alumni Association Past President Eleanor Frasier, BS Ed '61, M Ed '65, is chairwoman of the building committee.

Adjacent to the alumni center will be a parking garage, which represents the University's commitment to the building project. Prospective students and their parents can park there before coming inside to the visitors' center. Also new to the center will be a Campus club, where alumni, faculty and staff can meet.

The 60,000-square-foot center on four levels will be three times the size of the current Alumni Center on Stadium Boulevard. Other areas will include a great room for receptions, a banquet/meeting room to accommodate 400 guests, a board room for meetings up to 50, two smaller meeting rooms and a guest dayroom.

The center also will provide office space for development, alumni relations, visitor and guest relations, publications and alumni communication [the office that produces *Missouri Alumnus*], alumni records and building management.

The bigger space, Frasier says, means "expanded opportunities for groups of people who care very much about the University."