



This map shows buildings and attractions, such as Old Baldwin Hall and Wisdom Lake, in their original location before renovations took place. Custodian John J. Jack used to guard the lake from students who would attempt to swim in its waters despite the restriction. Design by Rose Runser/Index

Campus changes over years

Historical Places

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Staff Reporter

In the last 143 years since Truman's founding, campus has changed immensely. Land has been acquired, trees have been cut down, new buildings have been built and buildings have been razed, burned to the ground and renovated. The year 1923 was the last defining year that renders Truman's campus recognizable to current students.

Old Baldwin Hall

Old Baldwin Hall was the first building on campus, built in 1873 by the founder of the University, Joseph Baldwin. At the time, the building was named Normal Building, but it was renamed Baldwin Hall six years after Baldwin's death in his memory. The building sat in the middle of campus where Kirk Memorial and the Sunken Garden now call home. On Jan. 28, 1924, a fire ruined the building and much of the beloved historic materials that were inside. It started at 3:30 p.m. while many students were in class. Groups of students were rushed outside as they grabbed anything

they could from Violette's Museum on the way, according to a narrated presentation on the Pickler Memorial Library website by Pauline Knobbs, who was in class in Old Baldwin during the fire.

"When I got outside and looked up at the building, a wisp of smoke was coming out of the window next to the tower on the east side," Knobbs said. "I laid my books down under a tree near the lake and followed the students in through the tower door on the main [entrance] to see how I could help save materials from Professor Violette's museum."

Wisdom Lake, located on the Quad, was drained in order to put out the fire. When they realized nothing could be done, President Kirk, other faculty, staff and students, including Knobbs, simply watched the building burn to the ground, according to the "Centennial History of the Northeast Missouri State Teachers College" by Walter H. Ryle. The brick remains of the building were pushed into the lake and covered. If parts of the current Quad were excavated, remains of Old Baldwin Hall would be found under the ground.

Library Building

The first library on campus was Truman's second academic building, built in 1901. The building was connected to Old Baldwin so students

could stay out of treacherous weather when walking between buildings. There was a gymnasium situated on the first floor, the president's office and classrooms were on the second floor, and the library was on the third floor. The building also was destroyed during the 1924 fire, and nothing was saved from the collection. Its remains also can be found buried under the Quad.

"Luckily many of the artifacts that were in Baldwin were moved to Kirk [Building] not too long before the fire," Special Collections Librarian Elaine Doak said. "Otherwise, we would have lost everything."

Model Rural School House

The School House was built in 1905 as part of President John Kirk's concept of creating a laboratory school for students to practice teaching. Kirk changed the focus of the school to be a teaching college, and this was an important addition to him.

"President Kirk wrote in 1910 that 'the Model Rural School House exemplified the simplest, yet most complete, practical and economical architecture ever devised anywhere for rural or village schools,'" according to Walter H. Ryle.

During Kirk's presidency from 1899 to 1925, five major academic buildings and three small buildings

were built on campus and an additional 70 acres of land were acquired, including the 10 acres that have become the University Farm.

Doak said many of the most important changes occurred during Kirk's time at the University.

"He was here for a long time, and he made a lot of changes," she said. "He took the school from a little, normal school to a full-fledged teacher's college, making it a nationally-known institution," Doak said.

Science Hall

Science Hall, built in 1906, was located west of Old Baldwin, and the two buildings were connected by corridors on each floor. The campus experienced its first fatal fire on Sept. 18, 1918. Science Hall was completely gutted and the roof was destroyed. The installation of fire walls prevented this building from meeting its fate with Old Baldwin and the Library Building in 1924. In 1956, the building was renamed Laughlin Hall in honor of Harry H. Laughlin, a distinguished alumnus and internationally-known scientist, according to Ryle. The building was demolished in 1986 to make room for the expansion of Pickler Memorial Library.

Power Plant

The Power Plant is the oldest standing building on campus. It was built in 1905 to accommodate a

new boiler with an electrical generating plant to run the fans for heating purposes, electricity and to furnish electric lights to the University, according to Ryle. This also is when the underground tunnel system was built.

Wisdom Lake

The lake was located in the center of the Quad, and it stretched from where Ophelia Parrish currently is to the new Baldwin Hall. A steel bridge led from the entrance of campus on the north side to Old Baldwin Hall, and another steel bridge led to the Kirk Field on the northwest corner of campus. It was about 16 feet deep in its deepest part and was stocked with fish, but students hardly ever fished, according to Ryle.

There was an old ambition to get a water lily from the lake for a girlfriend or crush, according to Ryle. It was against the rules to swim in the lake, and the custodian, John J. Jack, took this rule very seriously. When students would try to swim to get water lilies for their girlfriends, Jack would shoot his gun out the window of his office in Old Baldwin to scare them off, according to Ryle. The students who succeeded in the feat of fooling Jack became heroes among the student body.

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