



The Heart of Michigan State University's Campus

Investigation of MSU's Changing Landscape, Identity and Priorities

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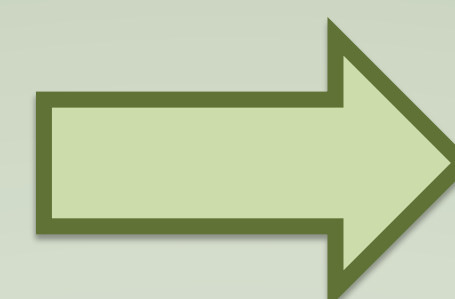
The Heart of Campus is more than a geographic middle point, it is a defining space for campus life, a monument for alumni remembrance and a major part of our collective university identity. As Michigan State University has grown and changed due to internal restructuring and greater external forces, the heart of campus also shifts.

By studying the shifts in the heart of campus, overall landscape change and the social processes that caused it, we can further understand what it meant to be a student during these periods and overall how our collective identity was constructed.

The MSU Campus Archaeology Program is dedicated to the protection and mitigation of archaeological resources on campus. Through our archaeological and archival work, we have divided the first hundred years of university history into four distinct thematic time periods. For each period, we have identified a focal point of campus based on archival research and archaeological evidence. Here we present the results of that research, as well as question where the heart is today.



Special Thanks
MSU Archives and Historical Records for permission to use photos, all historic photos are the property of the archives.
Dr. Lynne Goldstein, director of MSU Campus Archaeology, for advisement on history and archaeology of MSU.



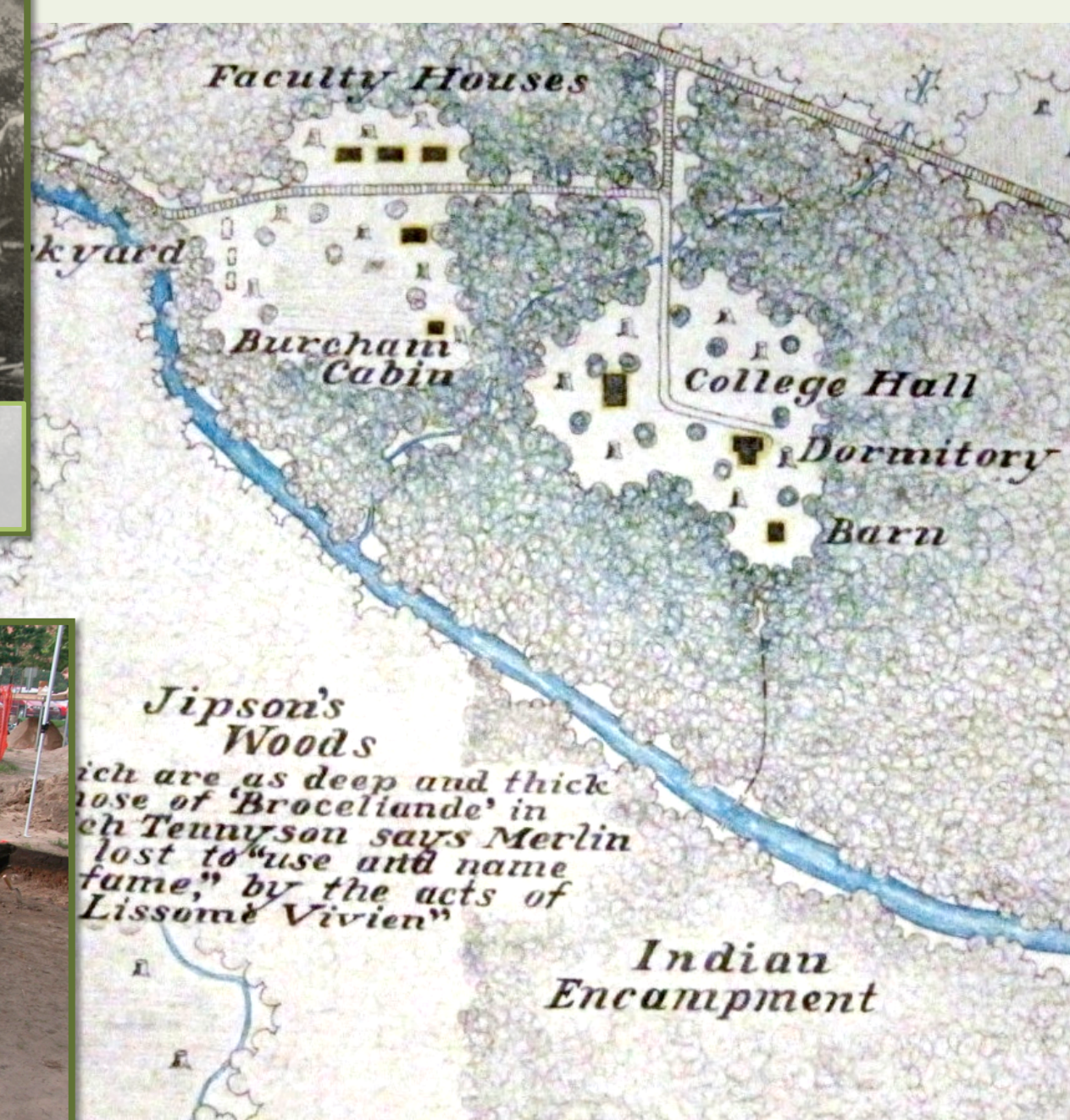
Beginning: 1855-1870



Saints' Rest circa 1856, students pose around their building



Saints' Rest excavation, summer 2005



The Agricultural College of Michigan State was established to create an opportunity for students to learn innovative techniques to bring back with them to their hometowns. As a new college decidedly independent from University of Michigan, it was a blank slate for the students and faculty to develop its identity.

Heart of campus: College Hall, the first building, and Saints' Rest, the first dormitory. These buildings became the symbols of our campus heritage and represented the intersection of living and learning.

Archival evidence: Personal investment they put into these spaces, displaying photos of the buildings and events in front of them.

Archaeology: excavations of these buildings have shown the pride in these early structures, and revealed information about early student life.



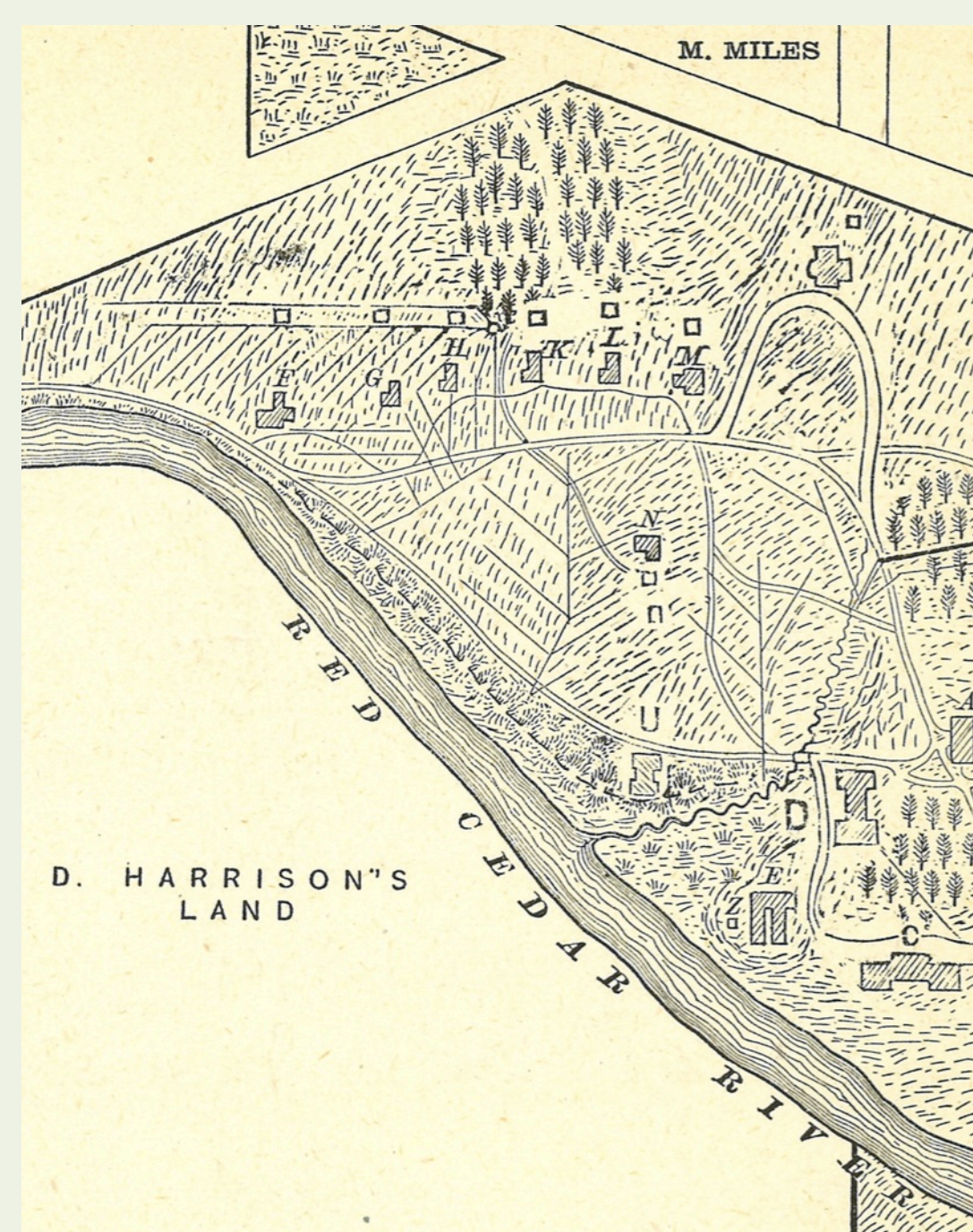
Foundation: 1870-1900

During this time period the college began to make a name for itself and became rooted in the community. Campus buildings focused on the central green space, with their main doors leading out into it. At this time, the current president declared this green area 'sacred' and deemed that it would not be built upon.

Heart of Campus: Sacred Space was the center of activity, cherished by students, and framed by the buildings. Within its boundaries is where the Rock was first placed in 1873, not to be moved until the 1980's.

Archival evidence: Scrapbooks and letters show an abundance of student life activities such as dances, receptions, barbecues, games, carnivals, and parades.

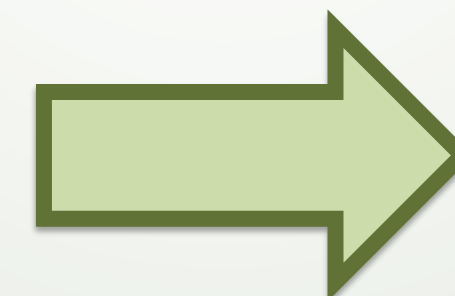
Archaeology: Excavations within this area have revealed original sidewalks and evidence of historic student activity throughout it.



Sacred Space in the late 19th century



Excavation of a historic sidewalk in the Sacred Space, summer 2011



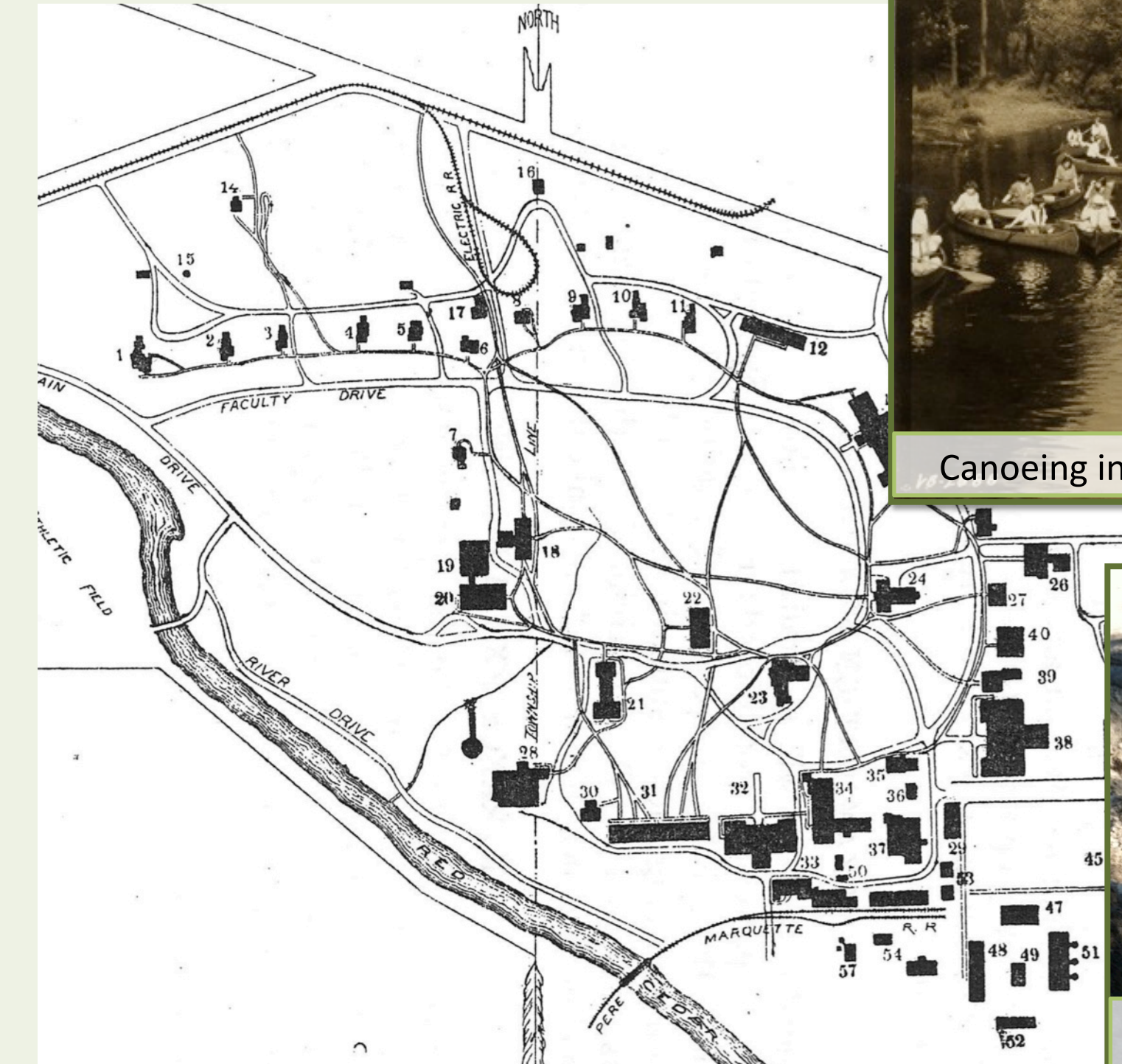
Expansion: 1900-1925

The Michigan Agricultural College identity continued to form as the curriculum and buildings expanded rapidly to accommodate an explosion in enrollment. Morrill Hall was built to accommodate women, expansion across the river occurred, and campus shifted in response to automobiles.

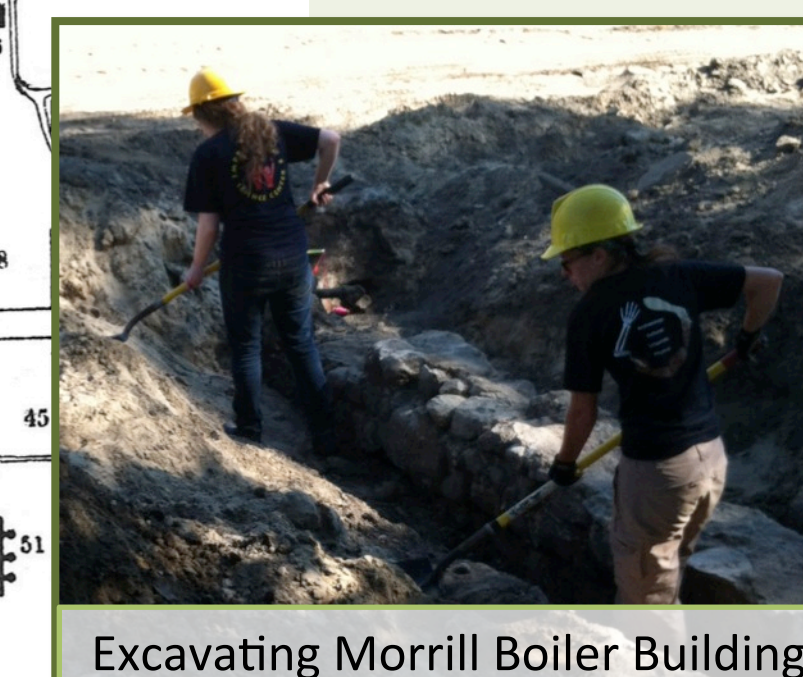
Heart of Campus: With expansion south, the Red Cedar River became a focal point of activity. Homecoming rafts were floated down the river.

Archival evidence: Enjoyment of the river is seen in scrapbooks and photographs, and river symbolism is seen in drawn pamphlets. Administrative memos and letters demonstrate the rush to respond to expansion.

Archaeology: Evidence is seen in a shift in landscape to serve cars and expedient buildings, like the Morrill Boiler Building which was only in use for five years to heat the women's building prior to the integrated heating system.



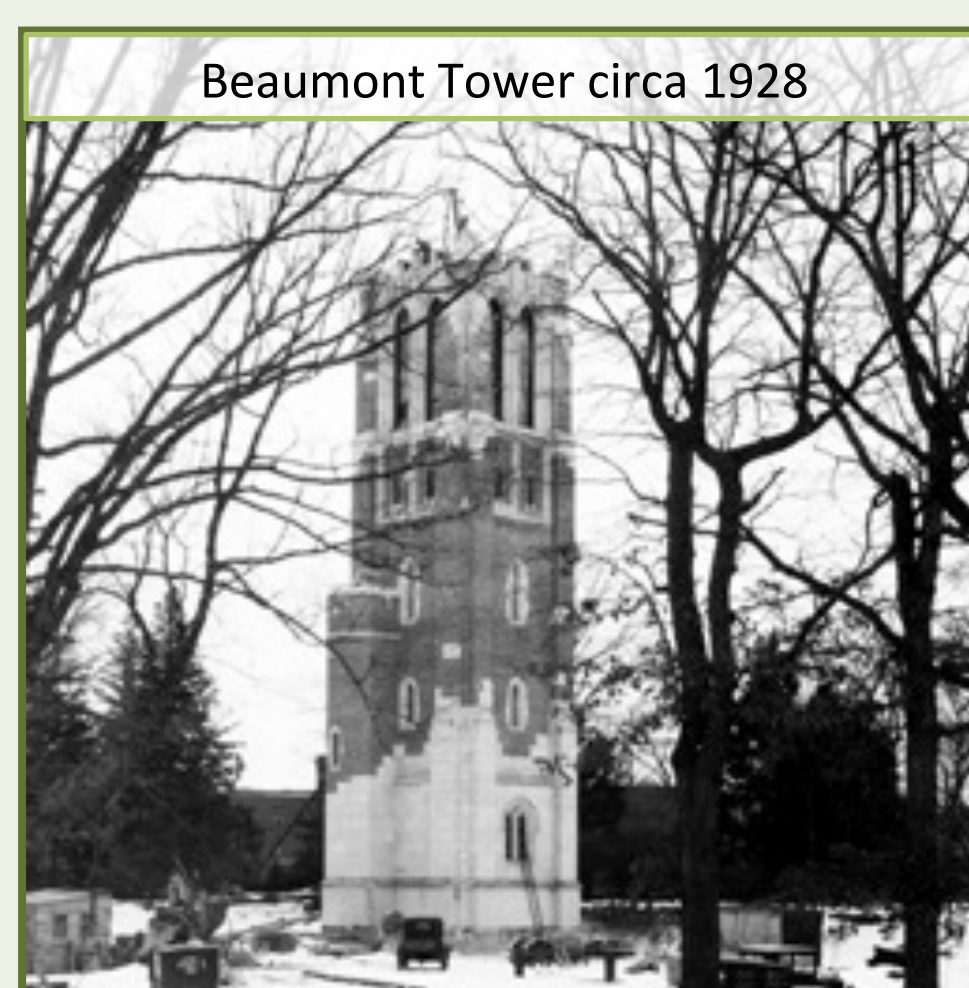
Canoeing in the Red Cedar River circa 1920's



Excavating Morrill Boiler Building, summer 2012



Legacy: 1925-1955



Beaumont Tower circa 1928



Surveying Beaumont Tower, summer 2010

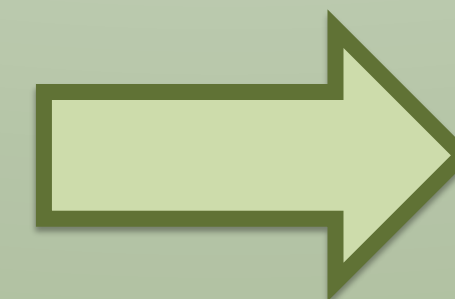


It is in this phase that Michigan State College actively cultivated their image and became what it is known for today. The legacy had been established through the changes and commitments during the previous time periods and we embraced pride in our "brand." The New Deal provided funds to expand the campus and attracted more students through the GI Bill.

Heart of Campus: Beaumont Tower was built in this era for alumni, to commemorate College Hall and the college legacy.

Archival Evidence: Photographs in the archives that were taken in front of Beaumont display a deep appreciation for its aesthetics and how it distinguished our college for students, faculty, and the greater community.

Archaeology: Portions of College Hall were found underneath Beaumont Tower, and we have artifacts from this era with the MSC brand



Where is the heart of campus today?



The university conducted a survey to determine where the 'heart' of campus was in the past decade. They had thought that students and alumni would pick Beaumont Tower and the Sacred Space as the heart. However, campus has shifted to the south, and this historic space is no longer the focus of activities. Most people said that the intersection of Shaw Lane and Farm Lane was the center, with the closest actual landmark being 'The Rock'. Due to this unexpected reaction, the university began to redevelop this area and put more money into the landscape here.

Future studies of the heart of campus and centers of activity will likely determine where the priorities for development and renovation will take place.

Where do you think the center or 'heart' of the campus is?