

# LOWRY HALL IN TRANSITION

## The Conjunction of the Red and White Campus

By Elizabeth M. Knox<sup>1</sup>

Lowry Hall is a beautiful English Tudor-style white limestone building located on the eastern edge of the Red Campus of the University of Missouri-Columbia campus. It is not a particularly large building, about 10,000 square feet, but with its 'H' plan with gabled extensions on each side of a main central hall plan, and its main entry doors and an abundance of windows facing the Red Campus Quadrangle, it presents an inviting reflection. That was the intent of those who planned and built Lowry in 1904.

The idea for Lowry Hall emerged from a challenge, raised by William Lhamon, to the Bible College Board of Trustees of the Disciples of Christ in June 1903. As the endowment financial agent (and later Dean), he proposed that a more concrete focus needed to be developed to increase confidence in the experimental endeavor of establishing Bible Colleges on college campuses. "We need a definite proposition to put up to our people. It should be for a definite increase in endowment or for a building ... just as soon as we can." The Board chose to propose a building.

The plan which developed was to build a \$25,000 building. On October 1, 1903, B. F. Lowry and his sister Eliza Lowry submitted a bequest of \$15,000, contingent on an agreement that the building be built for \$25,000. Lowry Hall and Lowry Street are named in their honor. The additional \$10,000 was subscribed by early 1904 and plans proceeded.

The architectural firm of Frank B. Miller and Charles Opel, of Jefferson City, were asked to draw plans for a suitable building within the \$25,000 limit. The plans called for a three-story English Tudor style structure to be made of native limestone and cut stone from the Bedford quarries of Indiana.

The bid accepted was about \$2400 less than the appropriation of \$25,000. Because B. F. Lowry was elected a member of the Board of Trustees subsequent to the \$15,000 donation, a discussion to place the \$2400 excess into the endowment fund was cut short by his remark that the agreement with him was that a \$25,000 building was to be built. Miller and Opel thus added to the specifications that the building have hard maple flooring throughout and quarry tile in the lower entry corridor.

Construction began in early summer 1904. The cornerstone was laid on August 8, 1904, a Sunday, at 3 p.m. with great ceremony, and in the presence of about 200 spectators including some prominent M.U. and Columbia officials and citizens. Sealed in the cornerstone were copies of a number of documents and local newspaper articles relating to the erection history of Lowry Hall, including the contract with Benjamin F. Lowry and Eliza Lowry and a Greek Bible. Lowry Hall was first occupied and used for classes the Fall of 1905.

The late 1940's begins a period of transition for Lowry Hall. A 1945 merger of Agriculture and Bible College

programs led to a Rural Seminary program established in 1952 to provide graduate degrees for students interested in the rural ministry; it was discontinued in 1972. This development gave rise to discussions concerning Lowry Hall: whether renovations or an addition, perhaps a chapel or a seminary building ought to be built to reflect the dual program. In 1955, extensive renovations and maintenance work on Lowry Hall was done during the summer. The College also had its name changed, in November 1956, to the Missouri School of Religion (MSR).

In early 1970 a fire started in the basement where a mimeograph machine and an abundance of paper were located. The MSR offices on the first floor had extensive damage from water and smoke; \$14,000 was expended to renovate the rooms so they could again be used.

The Missouri School of Religion Board moved in 1977-78 to discontinue its undergraduate program because of financial reasons and a desire to change its emphasis. Because Lowry Hall was no longer part of this change, MSR sold Lowry Hall to the University of Missouri Board of Curators on April 3, 1980 for \$270,000.

The future of Lowry Hall was a serious subject of concern during the Campus Beautification Workshops conducted in late 1980 and early 1981, which related specifically to the Lowry Mall—Lowry Street renovations. The focus of the Lowry Mall project was to close to some degree Lowry Street and to emphasize in a pleasing way the centrality of this part of the campus as a transitional area between the Quadrangle-Red Campus and the Memorial Union-White Campus. The final plan which emerged and was accepted by the University Board of Curators in May 1981 was to retain Lowry Hall and make it a focal point for converging the Red and White Campus sections.

The Lowry Mall project began mid-summer 1981, and essentially involved closing the street to traffic, covering it with red brick at a raised level and enlarging the area covered so as to accomplish a Plaza-look with a new, wider stair-entry to the library and a red brick eating area to the east of Lowry Hall.

In June the MU Law School was evaluated by the American Bar Association and confronted for problems with overcrowding in all areas—student, faculty and library space. Lowry Hall was proposed as a temporary solution to solve the ABA accreditation requirement to provide an adequate facility.

A preliminary evaluation of Lowry Hall by a structural engineer confirmed the University's evaluation that Lowry could not be renovated in its present condition. Due to structural safety problems, only the first floor had been used for classes the last decade. These problems were evident from the large cracks in the exterior walls, particularly the east wall and foundation, from the extremely unstable staircases and instability of the floors on the upper two levels, as well as extensive problems with rain leaking through the roof and in through window frames and dormer frames.

<sup>1</sup>This is an abridged version of the manuscript prepared by Elizabeth M. Knox which is now in the Missouri State Historical Collection. The authority to publish this version is through the courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Eugene J. Mackey and Associates, Architects, of St. Louis were consulted and hired to design plans to gut the building and rebuild within the existing exterior walls, except for the removal of the center of the east wall to provide space for constructing an addition to the building. The renovation plans were to be designed such that Lowry Hall, once vacated by the Law School, could easily be used for the multi-purpose functions originally recommended. Since Lowry Hall itself was designated as the focal point for joining the red and white campus sections, MU Architects determined that it be constructed of red brick (like the Lowry

Mall surface), and trimmed with the white limestone recessed from the wall section removed.

The gutting of the building began in mid-November, 1981. Although the recessed lettering "Bible College" above the front door (one word on each side of the stone face of the entry framing) will remain, Lowry Hall will undergo a rather rapid and abrupt change internally, but it will assume in a much more conspicuous way the center of the MU-Columbia campus as the explicit point of conjunction of the Red Campus-Quadrangle and the White Campus-Student Union sectors.

Members of the press are invited to join the business' look of Lowry Hall. A five-minute wide program on the renovation process will conclude the 30-minute visit.

The interior floor of the 1961 addition of law, Lowry Hall was gutted and rebuilt preserving the architectural design of the existing exterior walls. Only the center of the east wall was removed, adding 2,300 square feet to accommodate a new stairwell, elevator and lavatories. The refurbished structure, now totaling 21,500 square feet, is a focal point joining the two traditional campus directions: the central Francis Quadrangle area with the peripheral Lowry Hall and Memorial Union areas. The east extension, faced with red brick, juts into the White Campus complex encompassing the Lowry Hall structure. It is juxtaposed against the original 1916 structure which fronts on Fifth Avenue facing the older Red Campus.

Renovation costs totaled \$1,000,000.