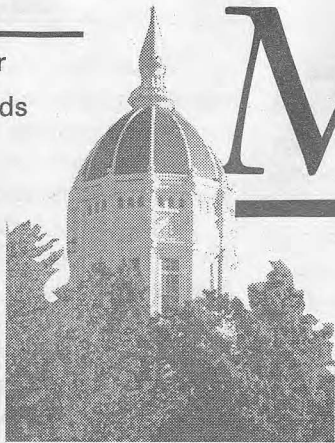


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Working for Staff
Meet the members of MU's Staff Advisory Council.
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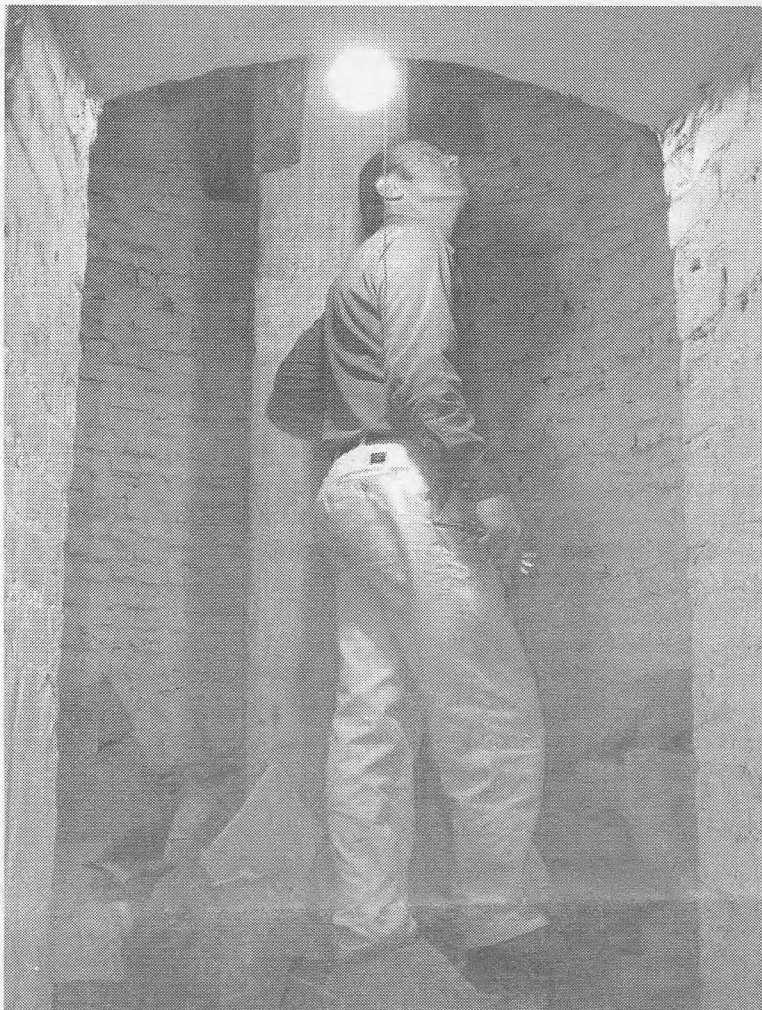
Plus or Minus?

Faculty are updated on plus-minus grading at MU.
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Food on the Brain

Study could provide insight into why people overeat.
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Oct. 14, 2004
University of Missouri-Columbia



A Mizzou mystery

PERPLEXING PUZZLE

No one knows why Switzler Hall was built with a three-story silo in its interior

Switzler Hall is a very old building with a very new mystery. Opened in 1872, Switzler Hall is MU's oldest academic building. It has housed the Agriculture College, the School of Journalism and civil engineering offices and labs. Today, the building houses the Department of Communication, Women's and Gender Studies, and the Special Degrees Program.

SECRET SILO

Dale Muckerman, quality assurance coordinator for Custodial & Special Services, inspects Switzler Hall's mysterious interior silo.
Photo by Campus Facilities Communications

It also houses a mysterious "silo" in its center. Through the center of Switzler Hall, behind walls and under floors that conceal it, a cylindrical, 8-foot-diameter, brick, silo-like structure rises from the basement to the roof.

In the middle of this cylinder, a solid, 2-foot-by-1.5-foot-thick wooden structure, which resembles perhaps a dumbwaiter device or, with steps attached on one side, a ladder, also rises to the attic. The cylinder is clearly integral to the original structure. The wooden apparatus, however, may have been added later.

At each of the three floor levels, a section of the cylinder has been cut away and, in the interior of the cylinder, a floor installed through which projects the "dumbwaiter" or ladder. The interior walls of the cylinder have also been plastered over, which creates a sizeable storage room. Construction plans

possessed by Campus Facilities Archives indicate that the flooring was installed in the late 1930s.

There was much speculation as to the function of this silo-like structure when it was discovered by Campus Facilities maintenance crews. Various authorities suggested it may have actually served as a silo for cattle pastured nearby; a means of access to the roof (via the wooden structure in its middle, which may have been a ladder); a means of heating and cooling the building (what appears to be a fire door covers an opening at the base of the cylinder); a drop tower for late 1800s, third-floor physics students studying acceleration and the motion of descending objects; and an elaborate means of venting chemical work benches in the basement and the analytical room on the first floor.

It wasn't until *Facilities Focus*, a publication of Campus Facilities, discovered that MU's 1872 "Scientific Building" was

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SILO from Page 1

modeled on a then state-of-the-art science building at “Michigan Agricultural College...four miles from Lansing” that the solution to the mystery began unfolding — maybe.

Michigan State University archivists located plans for a Chemical Laboratory Building erected in 1871 (the original architectural plans for MU’s Scientific Building are lost in antiquity). And, indeed, the Michigan State building had two interior structures going from the basement to the roof. One was for funneling rainwater from the roof to a metal holding tank built between two walls and into a larger cistern.

The second, based on a “revolutionary method” then in use at Bonn University in Germany, was a square “ventilating chimney” used with evaporating hoods for venting off gases in chemical experiments. The most likely solution, then, is that MU’s silo-like structure was used for venting gases from Professor Paul Schweitzer’s first-floor “analytical room.”

But in describing the Scientific Building’s first-floor “analytical room,” Schweitzer himself said only that “(a)mple provision is made for ventilation ... (with an arrangement of) ...

evaporating niches between the windows and the working tables of the students ... through which offensive gases and vapors are carried off, facilitating thereby greatly the purification of the air.”

Schweitzer makes no mention of fume hoods or of a chimney, round or square, and an inspection of the basement and first-floor ceilings reveals no architecture or structures indicating the transport of gases from the rooms’ interiors to the chimney. Would such a massive structure have been erected for a single “analytical room?” And what sort of system would have been employed to transport gases from “niches between the windows and the working tables” to the chimney at the center of the building? Could “offensive gasses” have been directed to opened windows?

Questions, questions, questions. Alas, the mystery of the Switzler silo is still just that — a mystery.

(This article and photograph were reprinted from *Facilities Focus*, a publication of Campus Facilities. *Facilities Focus* welcomes any reader information on Switzler’s silo. Call 573-882-3327 or e-mailedroleyl@missouri.edu.)