The campus is haunted by landmarks, vistas and views now buried under the avalanche of time.
CHAPTER 1

Ghosts

The great American playwright Arthur Miller graduated from Michigan in 1938. When he came back in 1953, his first visit in 15 years, he was dismayed by his first glimpses of a changed campus, especially the massive and unfamiliar new residence halls—“Stockwell Hall,” “Alice Lloyd Hall,” “West Quadrangle,” “East Quadrangle.”

“My memories of the place are sweet,” he wrote, “and so many things that formed those memories have been altered. There are buildings now where I remembered lawn and trees. And yes, I told myself as I resented these intrusions, in the Thirties we were all the time calling for these dormitories and they are finally built.”

Each cadre of students at Michigan goes through Miller’s experience. It began with graduates of the 1850s who came back after the Civil War and were surprised and a little wistful to find no cows grazing in the Diag. Every alumnus carries a cherished memory of Michigan—then returns in twenty years and realizes that “my Michigan” is hard to find among the new construction of someone else’s Michigan.

Those old Michigans make up a ghostly terrain we might call the Lost Campus.

CHAPTER 2

The Cat Hole

In the earliest times, the University needed no more space than the forty acres bounded by State Street and the three University Avenues. But when the campus began to grow, there was a natural barrier to the east.

Students called it the Cat Hole—a wild, marshy bowl with a meager pond at the bottom. (Why it was named for cats remains a mystery.)

In the 1870s, sophomores carried freshmen to the Cat Hole for dunking in the pond, and in winter, students flocked there for skating and coasting down the slopes.

An old woman named Johnson had a cabin overlooking the pond; she would tell students their fortunes from a deck of cards.

On a bird’s-eye map of Ann Arbor in 1880, the Cat Hole’s pond is clearly visible. The only University building to the east of it is the Detroit Observatory up on its lonely hill. The map shows the long, broad ravine that leads north from the pond—roughly the path that Glen Street now takes past Angelo’s Restaurant down toward the shallow valley of the Huron River.

In time, the Cat Hole filled up with piles of brush and debris, then disappeared altogether under bulldozers.

But when workers dug down to build a foundation for the parking structure behind the Power Center, they found the same underground sources of water that once fed the Cat Hole.
CHAPTER 3

The Boulevard

From the mid-1800s to around the time of World War I, before the village and the campus spread outward in all directions, students liked to hike out of town to escape the pressure of classes and study. One of their favorite destinations was a twisting dirt road up the steep slope between the road along the Huron River and Broadway at the summit.

On maps its name was Cedar Bend Avenue, but everyone called it “The Boulevard.”

“It seems rather pretentious to call it a Boulevard,” Judge Noah Cheever wrote at the turn of the 20th century, “still it makes up in beauty for what it lacks in extent….As many as nine hundred have been counted passing over this boulevard on a beautiful spring or fall day.”

It was a strenuous climb in Sunday clothes, but the reward was a series of lovely views of the campus and town. Cheever described the terrain in the Michigan Alumnus:

*The road bends around the ravines and the views…are very beautiful and impressive. Almost every rod of the road presents some new scenery and some features of interest and beauty. There is an island in the river near the Boulevard known as Picnic Island which adds much to the beauty of the river and the scenery upon this drive….It is….well to stop on the high ground just at the last bend before reaching Broadway… This view of the Huron valley, Picnic Island, the University hospitals and north portion of the city and a large portion of the country west and northwest, including the Huron valley, is very fine indeed.*

Old photographs and postcards show us what the hikers saw from the top. In the postcard shown here, from about 1910, we see in the foreground the farm fields that would become Island and Fuller Parks, with Fuller Road running from east to west toward town. The reddish-brown buildings at center left are part of the medical complex called the Catherine Street Hospitals. Just to the left of the hospitals, on the horizon, the dome of University Hall juts up about where Angell Hall stands now.

A 1905 graduate named Mabel Julia Moorhead treasured her memory of the Boulevard.

“Is it as beautiful now, I wonder?” she wrote 20 years after leaving Ann Arbor. “Those mornings when we planned to go out to see the sun rise—it always rained—and how much more attractive ‘sunrise from the Boulevard’ sounded the night before. But moonlight on the Boulevard! Oh! There was never anything to equal that.”

In the early 1900s the city of Ann Arbor bought 19.5 acres on the steep slope and made them the city’s first park, now called the Cedar Bend Nature Area. The old Boulevard was allowed to dwindle into an eroded dirt path, barely visible any more at some points. Oaks and hickories grew tall, obscuring most of the old views, though the prospect from Cedar Bend Drive, the uppermost segment of the old Boulevard, is still, as Judge Cheever said, “very fine indeed.”
Among the Bentley Historical Library’s countless files of historical photographs, there is a special collection gathered by the photographer Sam Sturgis. One folder holds the print shown here. On the back is this inscription, handwritten in pencil: “Campus Beauty.”

The photo shows a stout frame structure that is pretty obviously a community outhouse with fourteen private compartments—presumably half for men and half for women. Behind it one can see the cupolas of U-M’s old Homeopathic Hospital, which stood on the site of the Kraus Natural Sciences Building until the early 20th century. That, and a horse and wagon, put the time of the photo somewhere around 1900.

The term “Campus Beauty” may have been the actual name by which the structure was known, or it might have been Sam Sturgis’s private joke—the question awaits definitive research. In any case, the photo is rare documentation of an obvious fact: The campus was dotted with outdoor privies for many, many years.

Their demise came on the horizon in 1871, when James Burrill Angell, president of the University of Vermont, said he would accept the Regents’ invitation to take Michigan’s presidency only if they raised their salary offer from $4,000 a year to $4,500—and if they paid for the installation of a toilet in the President’s House. With three children, Angell and his wife, Sarah Caswell Angell, were reluctant to leave the fine president’s house just completed at Vermont without the promise of a toilet in the West.

The Angells’ installation is reputed to be the first flush toilet in Ann Arbor. But it was the 1890s before a sewer system was installed throughout the city and flush toilets became the rule instead of the exception.

Exactly when the last “Campus Beauty” was demolished, no one knows.
Imagine yourself on the foot bridge that spans Washtenaw Avenue between the Hill dorms and Central Campus. Look west toward State Street. See the back of the Ruthven Exhibit Museums (the building with the two stone lions in front)? That rear wing of the museum building sits on the site of the University of Michigan’s only zoo.

In the 1920s, U-M zoologists got the idea of displaying living Michigan mammals to the public. So, in the summer of 1929, with money from an anonymous Detroit donor, they erected a fenced-in brick hexagon with a shingled roof, then brought in the first residents—a badger, a red fox, six raccoons, two porcupines, four skunks and two black bears.

The next spring they added space for nine species of Michigan turtles and seven species of Michigan snakes, among them the garter, fox, water, hog-nose and blue racer. (The Eastern Massasauga rattler, the state’s only venomous snake, was not invited.)

The official name was alternately the Mammal House and the Animal House, but most people just called it the Zoo.

It was an early smash, especially with kids. “Occasional checks for one day showed that hundreds of children and adults were coming,” the director of the Museum of Zoology reported in 1930. “Perhaps the pleasure which the crippled children from the University Hospital have taken before the bear cage alone justifies the effort and expense.”

Four-footed residents came and went. One of the two wolverines that Fielding Yost tried to make into a living university mascot apparently was housed there, though it didn’t work out—no surprise, since the wolverine is not native to Michigan, with only one confirmed sighting in 200 years.

By modern zookeeping standards, it was pretty dismal. The mammals had little room to move around, and if their cages were smelly, the reptile quarters were a good deal worse.

People who grew up in Ann Arbor remember the Zoo with mixed feelings. “I always felt sad for the animals because their accommodations were so stark,” said one, “but I loved going to see them.” Many U-M students apparently missed the place altogether. “How on earth did I, and everyone I knew, spend four years in Ann Arbor and never realize there was a University Zoo?” asked a student of the early ’50s.

In 1962, needing more space, the museum closed the zoo and sent most of its last denizens to a small zoo in upstate Grayling. One or two may have wound up inside the Natural History Museum—stuffed.

—Jim Tobin

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Do you remember a spot or a view on the campus that no longer exists? Please send an email about it to heritage@umich.edu.

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Some passages of the chapter on U-M’s “zoo” are excerpted from James Tobin, “Animal House,” Michigan Today, 2/8/2012. Other sources include Noah Cheever (edited and annotated by John Knott with Alicia Lavalle), “Pleasant Walks and Drives About Ann Arbor” (Bentley Historical Library Bulletin No. 46, May 1999); Doris E. Attaway and Marjorie Rabe Barritt, “Women’s Voices: Early Years at the University of Michigan” (Bentley Historical Library Bulletin No. 47, October 2000);

Wilfred B. Shaw, ed., From Vermont to Michigan: Correspondence of James Burrill Angell, 1869-1871 (1936.) For guidance and information, the writer is grateful to the Ann Arbor historian Grace Shackman; Julia M. Truettner of the University Architect and Planner’s Office; and Karen Wight and Karen Jania of the Bentley Historical Library.

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