A Brief History of the University of Michigan

Founded in 1817 as the “Catholepistemiad of Detroit,” the University of Michigan was the first public university in the Northwest Territories. In 1821, the name was changed to the University of Michigan, and the University moved to Ann Arbor in 1837. At that time, Ann Arbor was a farm town of only 2,000 people. The town’s founders, John Allen and Elisha Rumsey, chose the name in honor of their wives—Ann Allen and Mary Ann Rumsey—and to recognize the massive oak trees in the area that created a natural arbor. The Ann Arbor Land Company donated the original 40 acre campus (bounded by State Street, South University, North University, and East University avenues) to the University.

U-M enrolled its first students in Ann Arbor in 1841. The University had only two professors who taught six freshmen and one sophomore. The five campus buildings consisted of four faculty homes and one classroom/residence hall building. The faculty’s farm animals grazed over the campus, and much of the campus was fenced in to keep the city’s and the University’s animals separated.

By the 1860s, the University was viewed as a model for newer state and public universities because it was the largest and most successful. It remained an all-male school until Madelon Stockwell was admitted in the winter of 1870.

Today, the University of Michigan has 19 schools and colleges with over 42,000 undergraduate and graduate students from all 50 states and over 130 foreign countries. Campus now stretches across Ann Arbor from the northeast to the southwest. The original 40 acres and their immediately surrounding areas are referred to as Central Campus and are featured in this tour.
Central Campus Walking Tour

   Originally built to house student organizations, the SAB is now home to the Office of Undergraduate Admission, University Housing, the Office of Financial Aid, the Huettl Visitors Center, and more. The Visitors Center was built, in part, by a gift from a 1936 graduate, Frederick G. Huettl.

2. Fleming Administration Building (1968)
   Named after the ninth U-M president and his wife, the offices of the University president and several vice presidents are located here. Architect Alden Dow created the distinctive window patterns, inspired by the Dutch artist Mondrian.

3. Regent's Plaza (1968)
   The plaza is a favorite gathering place. At the east end is an untitled sculpture by Bernard Rosenthal. Although it weighs nearly 3.5 tons, the cube spins easily on its axis.

4. Michigan Union (1919)
   Originally built as a social center for male students, women could only enter the building if escorted through the side doors. Women could use the front doors in 1993 and then the second floor billiards room in 1996. The statue on the front of the building is the scholar and the athlete, which represents the "Ideal Male Michigan Student." John F. Kennedy spoke on the steps of the Union on October 14, 1960 while campaigning for the presidency; he announced plans for the development of the Peace Corps.
   The Union now houses offices for student organizations and student services, study rooms, restaurants, a bookstore, the Campus Information Center, a travel agency, and more.

   The Museum of Art is housed in Alumni Memorial Hall, which was built to honor Michigan alumni who served in the Civil, Mexican-American, and Spanish-American Wars. It was home to the Alumni Association and served as a display area for the University's growing art collection. In 1995, the Museum became a separate unit of the University. Today, the Museum's collection includes over 14,000 paintings, prints, sculptures, and decorative art from the Middle Ages to the present.

6. Tappan Hall (1894, 1983)
   Named after U-M's first president, Henry Phipps Tappan, Tappan is the oldest standing classroom building on campus. It was first used for the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts' U-M classes and School of Education offices. Later it was the first site of the School of Business Administration. Today it holds the History Art Department and the Fine Arts Library. The building's addition is the only perfectly temperature-controlled building on campus.

7. William W. Cook Law Quadrangle (1924-1933)
   The Law Quadrangle was built with funds from the third largest gift received by the University at that time. Cook, an 1872 U-M graduate and a New York attorney, donated $16 million for the Law Quadrangle and Martha Cook Residence. The buildings exterior are modeled after the Tudor-Gothic style of Cambridge and Oxford. In the late 1950s, the library needed to be expanded, and in order to preserve the visual integrity of the Law Quadrangle, the library was built underground—winning architectural recognition. This was the first self-contained law school in the country with living facilities, classrooms, faculty offices, practice courtyards, and dining facilities in the same complex. The quad is made up of four separate buildings: the Charles T. Menger Residences in the Lawyers' Club (1924), John P. Cook Dorm (1930), William W. Cook Legal Research Library (1933), and Hutchins Hall (1933).

8. Martha Cook Building (1915)
   Named after William Cook in memory of his mother, the Martha Cook Building has been the most beautiful college dormitory in the United States. The all-female residence continues its tradition of Friday afternoon tea and formal dinners for faculty and distinguished guests. The statue above the entrance is of Pocahontas, from The Merchant of Venice. Cook considered her to be Shakespeare's greatest lawyer.

9. Lorch Hall (1928)
   Originally housing the art and architecture schools, which moved to North Campus in 1974, this building now houses the Economics and Linguistics departments.

    The original building was the first "sky scraper" on campus, because of the high cost of land after WW II. The 1980s renovation added a new library, more classrooms, offices, and the Executive Education Center. In 1995, the Executive Residence was added. The 2008 renovation project included a new $145 million building donated by alumnus Stephen M. Ross. The school's MBA and MPA programs are among the best in the country.

11. East Quadrangle (1940)
    Formerly a men's residence hall, East Quadrangle is now the co-ed home for over 900 students. Almost half of these students are enrolled in the Residential College, a self-contained liberal arts unit within the University. It is also home to summer orientation for incoming freshmen.

12. Library of American (1923)
    This library, one of the world's most outstanding resources on American history through the mid-19th century, is the gift of a former regent. It contains a rich collection of primary materials from the Revolutionary War to 1950, including letters from Benedict Arnold, George Washington, and the famous letter from Christopher Columbus to Queen Isabella proclaiming the discovery of the New World.

13. President's House (1860)
    This is the original University building still standing. It was one of the original four professors' homes. Multiple remodeling efforts have altered its appearance. U-M's second president, Erastus Haven, added the third floor in 1864, and James Angell, the third president, installed indoor plumbing in the first building in Ann Arbor to have it.

    Named after the eighth U-M president, the library houses approximately three million volumes written in several hundred languages. The original stacks were finished in 1883, the first section (including the Diag) in 1902, and the entire library addition in 1970. Special features of the library include the beautiful reading room, the extensive collections of the Map Library, the Papyrology Collection, the Department of Knowledge Navigation Center for information technologies, and the priceless rare and special books collection. The two murals in the reading room were purchased from the 1983 World's Columbian Exposition.

15. The Diag
    The Diag marks the center of the original 40 acres of land donated by the Ann Arbor Land Company in 1837. In 1840-1841, four faculty homes were built on the north and south boundaries and the land was used as gardens and pasture. Trees were planted in the areas and students and faculty added to add shade to the otherwise open farmland and old orchards. As buildings began to enclose the Diag, it became a popular meeting place, as well as a center for banners, protests, and social and political demonstrations. Legend has it that if you step on the bronze "M" in the middle of the Diag before you finish your first "blue book exam," you'll fail it.

16. Samuel T. Dana Building (1903)
    Home of the School of Natural Resources and Environment, the building was named for S.T. Dana's first dean. It is known for the distinctive features of solar power and composting toilets. Originally served as the University's second medical building and was named West Medical Building after the construction of East Medical (C.C. Little). Since the medical facilities were a part of different buildings, it was not uncommon to see cadavers wheeled across the path to the East Medical Building.
Harold and Vivian Shapiro Library (1958, 1995)  
Named for U-M's tenth president, this building houses three distinct libraries: the Shapiro Undergraduate Library, the Shapiro Science Library, and the Askwith Media Library. In addition to over 190,000 volumes, the Undergraduate Library provides services and resources designed to enhance the undergraduate experience, including Bell's Full-Service Cafe. The Science Library contains over 60,000 volumes, making it one of the largest single collections of science publications in the country.

West (1994, 1910) and East (1923, 1947, 1956) Halls  
These halls were the former home of the College of Engineering but have been used by other departments since the College's move to North Campus, beginning in 1955. East Hall houses the Departments of Mathematics and Psychology. West Hall holds a naval test tank, the first-ever built at a university, and is home to the Department of Anthropology and Complex Systems. Professor Charles Dennison designed the "West Engin Arch" to maintain the traditional walkway through campus. Michigan folklore states that a person is not a true coed until closed under the "West Engin Arch" at midnight. The folklore dates back to the time when men lived in the Central Campus residence halls, women lived in those on the Hill, and curfew was 10:00 p.m.

David M. Dennison Building (1963)  
Built in one of the most congested areas of campus, designers felt that the arrangement of two parts, one high and one low and long, created a feeling of open space. The two-part complex, named after the Department of Physics chairman, originally housed the Department of Astronomy and Physics. Now the Departments of Astronomy and Organizational Studies are located here.

College of Pharmacy Building (1960)  
Pharmacy was first taught in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, but a separate College of Pharmacy was established in 1876. It was the first of its kind within a state university.

Clarence Cook Little Building (1925)  
Originally part of the Medical School (East Medical Building), this building now houses the Geological Sciences Department and provides classroom space for several other departments. It is named for U-M's sixth president.

Chemistry Building (1909, 1949) and Willard Henry Dow Laboratory (1969)  
The University's hospital once occupied this site, and it was the first hospital in the country owned and operated by a university. The building was torn down in 1907 to make room for the Chemistry Building. The newer section of the building was the largest chemistry facility constructed by an American university in the 1980s. It has a special ventilation system that ensures safe air in the event of a chemical spill. This building is also home to the Office of International Programs and the Science Learning Center, a student resource center for the study of the natural sciences.

Alexander G. Ruthven Museums Building (1928)  
Now commonly called the U-M Exhibit Museum, it was named after U-M's seventh president and long-time museum director. It contains the museums of anthropology, paleontology, and zoology. Popular exhibits are the planetarium, mineral collections, and dinosaur skeletons. The puma statues in front of the building were chosen because they symbolized grace and power. The puma is a native of Michigan and is in danger of extinction.

Central Campus Recreation Building, Kinesiology Building, Dance Building (1976), and Margaret Bell Pool (1954)  
Commonly called the CRBB, it is one of three campus recreation buildings for students. Within the CRBB lies the Margaret Bell Pool, built in 1954 to provide more athletic facilities for women, who lived in the nearby "Hill Area" residence halls. The CRBB was added on to the Bell Pool in 1976 and was built solely from Athletic Department funds. Connected buildings house Kinesiology and the Department of Dance. The Kinesiology section includes laboratory and classroom space for students studying physical education, athletic training, sport management, and movement science. Kinesiology also utilizes the Observatory Lodge, located a block away, as additional space for classrooms and faculty offices.

Hill Area Residence Halls  
There are five residence halls on the Hill, all of which were originally all-female dorms until the University changed to coed dorms in 1967. The halls are Stockwell Hall (1930), Mosher-Jordan (1935)—named for the first two deans of women, Alice Crocker Lloyd (1909), Cozens (1925), and Mary Markley (1936). Several of these halls are now home to living-learning programs for first- and second-year students.

Undergraduate Science Building (2007)  
The Undergraduate Science Building is a state-of-the-art teaching facility utilized for undergraduate study. The building provides teaching laboratories for the Departments of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology and offers other interdisciplinary science instructional spaces. It is home to the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program; Women in Science and Engineering; the Life Sciences, Values, and Society Program; and the Neuroscience Program.

North Hall (1900) and Museums Annex (1919)  
North Hall houses the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. It was originally built to house the Homeopathic Hospital and Medical School. The small building to the right of North Hall is the Museums Annex, which was originally the children's ward of the hospital.

University Health Service (1940)  
UHS provides general health care services, for which most fees are included in students' tuition. Services offered include specialties such as ophthalmology, dermatology, and psychiatry. UHS also has a pharmacy.

Power Center for the Performing Arts (1971)  
The 2,500-seat theater is used for drama, dance, concerts, and lectures. In the lobby hang two tapestries, Picasso's "Voiles" and Lichtenstein's "Modern Tapestry."
houses the David Gerstein, the third heaviest musical instrument in the world, with 55 bells ranging from 12 pounds to 2 tons. The soft-fiber bell chamber is open to the public during posted hours. The tower contains music practice rooms, classrooms, and the Music Building's Main Auditorium.

Thomas M. Cooley Fountain (1940)

The fountain depicts Triton, the Greek god of the sea, frolicking in the waves with his children. It was a gift from Charles J. Walker in honor of law professor and dean Thomas Cooley. The fountain was created by famous sculptor Carl Milles and is titled “In Deep Water.” For decades, students called it “We Go to Little Fishes.”

Michigan League and Mendelsohn Theatre (1929)

The League was built for female students as a response to the Michigan Union. The two statues on the front façade represent the “ideal female Michigan student” as exemplifying the ideals of friendship and character. The League was designed by the Union’s architects, the Alling & Stimson firm, and built by the Michigan Union Building Co.

Hill Auditorium (1913, 2004)

This acoustically perfect 4,200-seat auditorium is used for concerts, plays, discussions, and other public events. Donated by Regent Arthur Hill, it is home to the Great Lakes Opera and the Michigan Opera Theatre. The glass-enclosed area between Mason and Hill is called the “Fishbowl” and is a central location for student organizations to advertise and promote their activities.

Edward Henry Kraus Building (1915)

Referred to as the Natural Science Building, it is the home of the Department of Biology. The 300-foot conservatory on the southwest corner is used for botany instruction.

Angell Hall (1920), Haven Hall (1922), Mason Hall (1925), and Tisch Hall (1996)

The current Angell, Haven, and Mason halls replaced earlier buildings. Angell Hall was the central structure on campus for many years. Named in honor of former U-M president James B. Angell, it was built to house the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA). The building was originally to have a bell tower as well as two wings extending to the ends of the block. Due to lack of funds, it was stopped when it stood today. The previous Haven Hall was the original Law School site and sat north of Angell Hall, not part of the present complex. The Haven name was reused when Old Haven burned down in 1950. The old Mason Hall (1894), named after Stevens Mason, the governor of Michigan when U-M moved to Ann Arbor, was the original classroom building, like Old Haven Hall. Old Mason Hall stood until 1950 and was replaced by the current building. Tisch Hall, connecting Angell and Haven halls to the south, was added in 1996 to provide additional classroom and office space. Today, Angell, Haven, Mason, and Tisch halls house several departments within LSA, as well as classrooms, lecture halls, and the second-largest student computing site on campus.

Betsy Barbour (1920) and Helen Newberry (1915) Hall

These two all-female residence halls were private gifts to the U-M, named after the donors’ mothers. Betsy Barbour’s donation was prompted by her marriage to the “father of modern psychology,” William James. When she died, her husband left money in his will to create a residence hall for women. Helen Newberry Hall was named in honor of her husband, who was a University of Michigan alumnus.

Betsy Barbour’s donation was prompted by her discovery of the “sexually inferior” living conditions for women in town. For decades, students found room and board mostly with Ann Arbor residents. Barbour had convinced two female Chinese scholars to enroll at U-M, and when one died of tuberculosis due to the poor living conditions, she wanted to create the ideal residence hall in order to ensure that such a tragedy would not recur. Newberry Hall was a gift to the University from Helen’s children.

Stanford House Student Publications Building (1932)

This building houses the Board of Student Publications, a student-run organization that publishes a literary magazine, humor magazine, yearbook, student directory, and a newspaper.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (1891, 2008)

Once called Newberry Hall, the Kelsey Museum has extensive collections of archaeological objects from the Mediterranean region and the Near East. The building is the work of German stonecutters who settled here in the 19th century. It was built and used by the Student Christian Association until 1924, when it was leased to the University for classroom space (and in 1928 for the museum). The Student Christian Association transferred ownership to the U-M in 1937.

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