

MAIN GATE AND AUBURN OAKS AT TOOMER'S CORNER
Entrance to Auburn University's Campus, Intersection of West
Magnolia Avenue and South College Street
Auburn
Lee County
Alabama

HALS AL-3
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

MAIN GATE AND AUBURN OAKS AT TOOMER'S CORNER

HALS NO. AL-3

Location: The southwest corner of Magnolia Avenue and College Street intersection and the northeast end of Samford Park, Auburn University, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama.

Coordinates: Lat 32.606839 Long 85.481731 (NGS PID CM675, under pavers).
There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: Toomer's Corner is Auburn's town center which hosts celebrations of athletic victories, political and religious speeches, breaking news, and town gatherings. Two oak trees that once occupied the site near the historic Main Gate had to be removed after a rival football fan poisoned the trees with herbicide. Toomer's Corner is best known for celebrations involving the "rolling" of the corner with toilet paper where large crowds of Auburn fans gather after athletic triumphs. This ritualistic event hosted at the threshold between campus and town is an expression of the "Auburn Spirit," and makes the site both sacred and culturally significant to the community.

Description: This report focuses on the southwest corner of the intersection which includes a pair of brick and mortar gates each adorned with marble eagles that function as the entrance to Auburn University's campus. They each measure approximately 10 feet in length and 14 feet in height and were donated by the WWI class of 1917.

The ground of the southwest corner of the intersection is paved with standard bricks and concrete pavers laid in a herringbone pattern that cover the site from College Street and Magnolia Avenue toward campus stopping at the low curved wall used as a bench approximately 77 feet southwest from the intersection. The paving is contained by curved brick walls used as benches. Beyond these walls are planting beds and sidewalks that extend into Samford Park and the rest of campus. There are two lamp posts, a traffic light pole, a fire hydrant, access panels for mechanical equipment, and inset lights to illuminate the pair of walls that comprise the Main Gate. Under the tree locations are raised beds, approximately six inches in height, with mulch bordered by granite curbs.

The two trees that once occupied the site were Southern Live Oaks (*Quercus Virginiana*), a species native to the southern United States. The College Street tree reached a height of 44 feet with a canopy span of 64 feet, and the Magnolia

Avenue tree grew to 30 feet in height with a 46 foot canopy diameter. This species produces small, dark green leathery leaves with pale undersides, and small acorns. The bark is dark, thick, and grooved longitudinally. The wood is hard, heavy and strong.

History: At some point there was a white picket fence that enclosed the campus on the site but it has long since been removed. The fence's northeast corner was located where the gate now sits and was the main reason the gate was built, to make the campus more accessible from Toomer's Corner.

The Main Gate was donated by the WWI class of 1917. The eagles were donated in 1961, replacing two stone spheres. The Main Gate bears a plaque that reads, "Eagles placed by William C. "Red" Sugg, Class of 1931. Other plaques found on the gate read, "Class of 1917." The original was adorned with electric lights prior to electric street lights being installed and making them unnecessary.

In the median that begins at the intersection and runs one block south down College Street are traffic light poles, concrete paving, mulch beds, plants, trees and a marble boulder. The boulder, approximately 32 inches high, 30 inches wide and 36 inches deep, bears a bronze plaque that reads "Auburn - Alabama. Settled by Judge J.J. Harper and others from Harris County, Georgia, in 1836. This region was opened to settlement in 1836-37 by the removal of the Creek Indians to lands west of the Mississippi River. - erected by The Alabama Officers Club, daughters of the American Revolution, March 14, 1934."

The oaks were planted around 1928-1930 and have survived many celebratory toilet paper rollings followed by high pressure washings, several arson attempts, and a car collision with the College Street oak. On January 28th, 2011, it was confirmed that the trees were poisoned with an extremely high level of Spike 80DF herbicide, by a rival football fan following a loss to Auburn University's football team. The fan had called a radio show in Birmingham, Alabama the previous day claiming to have done so. Auburn's football team, the Auburn Tigers, went on to become the 2010 BCS National Champions (14-0). The two oaks were removed the morning of April 23, 2013.

Future development plans for the site and the renovation of Samford Park released on April 20, 2013, include planting two White Oaks where the Live Oaks once grew, repaving and providing additional seating.



Author: Unknown

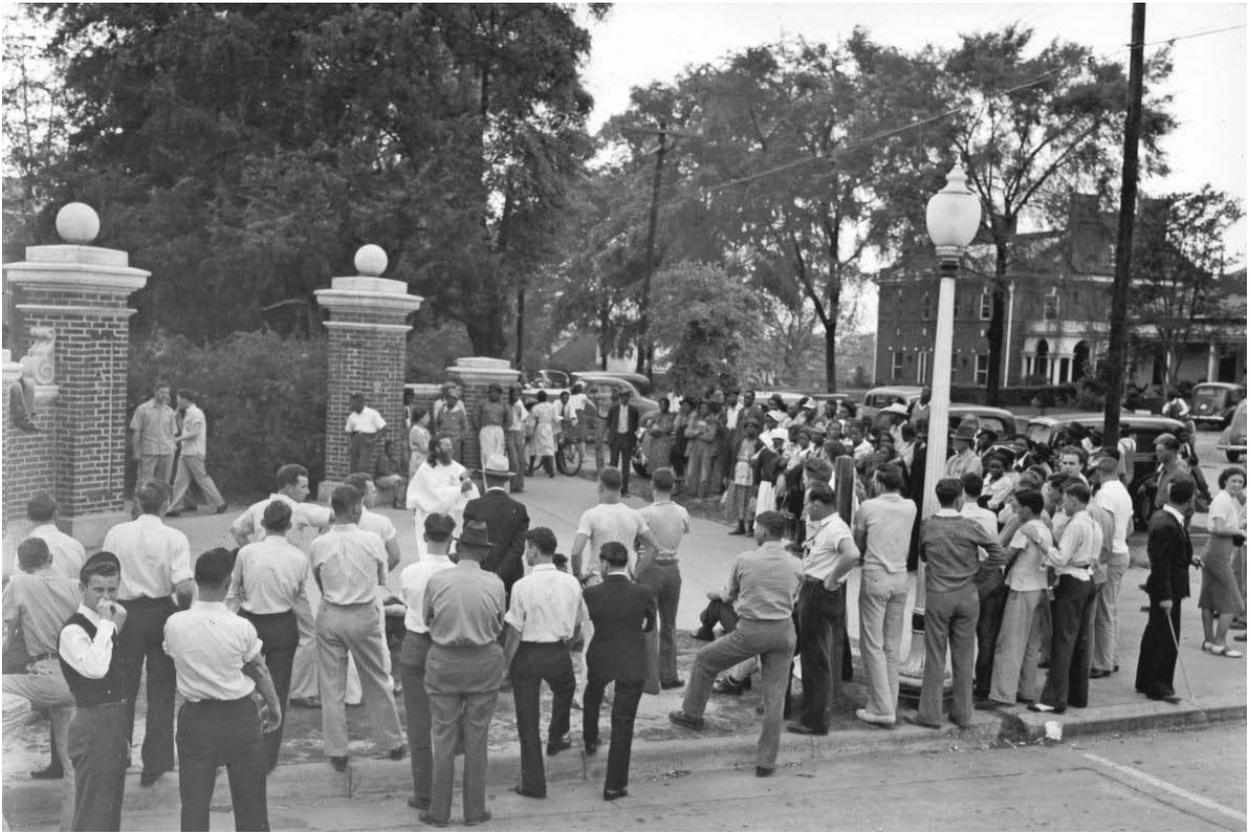
Title: Unknown

Date: circa 1930

Location: College Street, north of Toomer's Corner, looking south-southwest

Source: Special Collections & Archives Department - Auburn University Libraries

This photo shows the College Street oak in its early years, proving the trees were planted around the 1930s.



Author: Unknown

Title: Unknown

Date: circa 1930

Location: College Street, at Toomer's Corner, looking south at the Main Gate

Source: Special Collections & Archives Department - Auburn University Libraries

This photo shows the College Street oak in its early years, proving the trees were planted around the 1930s. The image also shows the nature of some of the gatherings that took place at the corner and the older spherical stones on top of the walls.



Author: Unknown

Title: Unknown

Date: circa 1930

Location: College Street, at Toomer's Corner, looking southwest at the Main Gate and Samford Park

Source: Special Collections & Archives Department - Auburn University Libraries

This photo shows the College Street oak in its early years and the boulder in the College Street's median.



Author: Ivan Vanchev

Title: Scanning Toomer's Corner

Date: April 12, 2013

Location: Toomer's Corner, standing between the Main Gate walls looking northeast across the College/Magnolia intersection

This photograph shows the last laser scanning session obtained prior to the cutting of the trees. This scan and two previous scans (2011, 2012) performed by other Auburn University faculty and students were used for the production of the drawings.



Author: Doug Bacon

Title: Auburn Oaks Last Roll

Date: April 20, 2013

Location: Magnolia Avenue, north side looking south toward the oaks.

Source: Doug Bacon

This photograph shows the tradition of "Rolling Toomer's," taken during the last rolling prior to the two trees being cut down.

Bibliography:

Logue, M., & Simms, J. (1996) Auburn: A pictorial History of the Loveliest Village.

Askew, W K. (1983) Class of 1917: A History 1913-1982.

Draughton, R Jr., Hughes, D., Person, A. (2012) Lost Auburn: A village remembered in period photographs.

Photography Sources:

Auburn University Special Collections and Archives Department.
Miscellaneous Collection #708
Series I, Drawer 16, Toomer's Oaks
Hal Smiths photographic investigation of age of trees.

Auburn University Special Collections and Archives Department.
Self indexing photography collection
Series I

Historian: Prepared by Doug Bacon and Ivan Vanchev, (completed) 25 June 2013.