



The Missouri Book Store Is **70**

The Missouri Book Store is so firmly rooted in the heart of Campus that some freshmen who buy books there probably think it's part of the University. The name helps give that impression, as does the location. The story of how a pre-med student named Reuben Lucas started the Missouri Store goes back 70 years. Since then the parent organization, the Missouri Store Company, has grown to include bookstores on 19 other campuses from California to Florida, a rapidly expanding wholesale used-book business, and more recently, Chapter 1, the first of a chain of trade-book stores.

Back in 1909 Lucas noticed that the textbooks students left lying around at the end of the semester could be making money if someone sold them the next semester for less-than-new-book prices. So the Nevada, Missouri native and a few friends incorporated and opened the Missouri Store at 9th and Conley, where the southwest corner of Ellis Library is now. Today, Reuben's two sons, R. E. Jr. (Bud) and Bill, daughter Rosemary and her husband, M. Stanley Ginn, are majority owners. All are alumni.

RIGHT FROM THE START, the Missouri store offered more than books. It included the College Room, one of the first off-Campus "jelly joints." There, in the privacy of Columbia's first high-backed booths, the college crowd could sip sodas, order sandwiches and indulge in other activities like smoking, etc. Smoking was formally frowned upon by the University, but it was the "etc." that most worried the dean of women. The administration requested the backs be lowered. "We deliberated quite some time," says Bud Lucas, company president. "We decided to stand our ground. The booths stayed."

The Missouri Store would stand its ground today, too, if the University were to go after the prime location the private business has occupied since 1922. That was the year the store opened its new building on Lowry Street, having sold its first location to the University. The move to Lowry Street placed the Missouri Store squarely on what would become the main path between Francis Quadrangle and White Campus. A few of the White Campus buildings had already gone up, and anyone paying attention to the Board of Curators and the Missouri Legislature could see that many more would follow.

Private residences once filled the area between the Red and White campuses and by the early '20s,



The Missouri Book Store's first location at Ninth and Conley became a popular student hangout.



The children of founder Reuben Lucas — Bill, Bud and Rosemary — and her husband, M. Stanley Ginn, far left, are now the majority owners.

many of them were owned by the Missouri Store Company, which leased them for student boarding houses. "We held property — refused potential buyers — when the University didn't see fit to buy it, and then later turned it over with more or less an 'interest charge' and nothing more," says Lucas. "The University has been good to us and we wanted to reciprocate. We kept a favorable location, and now we could not give up any more of our property." In the early '60s when the University started filling in the space with B&PA, Fine Arts and several other new buildings, the book store doubled its size.

NO COLLEGE BOOKSTORES make much money on books, which is why you don't find them in the main traffic areas anymore. The basement of the Missouri Book Store used to house an eatery called the Jungle, which gave way to the popular M-Bar. Now the basement is where students find textbooks. The M-Bar is gone, but one of the nation's few on-campus McDonald's is leasing the rest of the basement. Technically, of course, it's not on Campus, since the University doesn't own the lucrative little island of private enterprise.

The main floor display area is given over to a vast assortment of academic and non-academic needs and non-needs that have one thing in common — they're a lot more profitable than textbooks. Almost any item that can be imprinted with "Tigers" (or MU) is there, too, ready for the University tour buses that stop at Memorial Union just across the street. Students can buy stamps, mail letters or packages and cash checks. As one of Bud Lucas' favorite slogans goes, "Ours is a trade that service made."

Textbooks are a "loss leader" because the standard publisher's discount is only 20 percent below list price, says Lucas. The profit margin on used books is about one-third, but Lucas says over 85 percent of textbooks sold are new because professors change books often.

Used books, of course, cost students less. The parent company has a division specializing in that field, too. Missouri Book Services was begun five years ago, and, Lucas predicts, "will be the tail that wags the dog." The wholesaler has nearly doubled its sales volume each year and is the most electronically-aided book jobber in the U.S., Lucas says. "We could save students money if more professors would tell us their needs and let us help them find a good used book," Lucas says.

It should be noted that Mizzou has had its own book store since 1900, when President Richard Jesse and six professors each put up \$100 to start it. The store was in the basement of Jesse Hall until 1952, when it moved to Memorial Union. Dr. A. G. Unklesbay, a former professor and administrator, chaired a book store advisory committee in the late '50s. "Whatever the University handled wasn't supposed to compete too much with private business," he recalls. But Unklesbay also remembers an oft-repeated quip about the University supporting its own book store "because it was the only way to keep the Missouri Book Store from scalping students."

"I never thought of the two stores as competing because the University's just didn't have much besides books," says a late '50s graduate. "Maybe we were deadheads, but nobody complained about the Missouri Book Store's making a killing. Of course, we wasted a lot of time and money in the M-Bar."

Now the University Book Store is in Brady Commons. It competes with the private store and operates in the black, but hasn't nearly the floor space, nor probably the location. "You won't find any other privately owned book stores sitting in the heart of campuses," says manager Will Connor. Lucas says his store's location is "unique; there's no question about it."

Faculty are critical of the quality of both stores. English associate professor Tom Cooke says neither is "what I would call a serious book store. They specialize in 'coffee table books.'" Many professors applaud Missouri Student Services, a student-run store which sponsors a consignment book pool each semester. The buyer pays less than either book store charges, but the seller gets more than the stores would have paid for the book.

THE LUCAS family and the Missouri Store Company maintain a low public profile, but the principals are people of influence, considerable real estate holdings and wealth. They have long supported the University with gifts to the Development Fund. For 16 years Rosemary Ginn was Missouri's Republican national committeewoman and served as ambassador to Luxembourg under President Gerald Ford.

Lucas says the company is interested in University affairs, "but we avoid involvement in its politics. We have no influence of any sort and prefer it that way. They do a good job of education, and we like to do a good job of selling books." □