

If fires blaze at Texas A&M...

No fire drills — yet

Dorm evacuation plans set

By MICHELLE SCUDDER
Battalion Staff

The Commons area residence halls are the only University dorms that have a visual fire alarm system, the extinguishers and evacuation plan.

A broad policy set by the University says each residence hall must have a fire evacuation plan, a portable fire extinguisher in each resident adviser's room, and some type of fire alarm system, either visual or audible.

This broad policy is applied specifically to each dorm," said Gene Oates, security and maintenance supervisor for the residence halls.

The fire evacuation plan would be different for each dorm depending on whether it's an inside or outside corridor dorm," Oates said.

There has to be a different configuration of the buildings; some were built in 1911, and some right now."

"The Commons area dorms are the only ones wired specifically for fire alarms," Oates said. The fire alarms at the Commons are smoke detectors that activate in case of fire, the Corps area dorms and the North area dorms have audible alarms, which means that whistles are blown, or the head resident informs the residents of fire.

Tom Murrey, area coordinator for the North area dorms, said a fire extinguisher is located in each staff room, or one for every two ramps on the North area.

"If a fire occurs and there is any chance that it cannot be handled by an extinguisher, the emergency fire number is called," Murrey said.

All campus residents are given a copy of a fire and emergency evacuation route plan, and an explanation of what to do in case of fire or emergency.

Glenn Ferris, area coordinator for

the Commons dorms, said a 10-pound dry chemical fire extinguisher is in each head resident's office, an extinguisher is in every resident adviser's room (two per floor), and an extinguisher is in each maintenance room (two per floor).

Ferris said residents have access to the extinguishers since they are in the resident adviser's rooms.

"A disadvantage to having them in the hallways would be that people have a tendency to play games with them and expend the chemicals inside," Ferris said.

Although all residents have a plan for evacuation, Oates said fire drills have never been held.

"Most students are mature enough and knowledgeable enough about the way that the residence hall is built, that there is no need for the harassment or regimentation of a fire drill," Oates said.

"With the types of small dorms we have at Texas A&M, it seemed as well or better to instruct students through a floor plan and evacuation procedure, rather than a fire drill," Oates said.

Ferris said there are plans to have a fire drill at the Commons dorms this fall.

"First we wanted to publish the evacuation plan and give one to every resident so everyone would be briefed. We plan to have one later in the semester," Ferris said.

Oates, who has been with Texas A&M 14 years, said he couldn't recall a major fire in a residence hall. He said one or two minor fires occur each year that have caused slight damage.

Regulations against cooking in the dorms are designed to discourage fire hazards. Murrey said a primary concern is overloading the electrical system, which might cause a fire.

Old Main up in smoke in '12; other fires singe A&M's past

By MARK BEATTY
Battalion Reporter

The last major fire of a structure on campus occurred in July 1977 when a container in the basement storage area of the Memorial Student Center caught on fire, according to the College Station Fire Department.

The contents of the containers included books, paper forms and mess trays which caused a considerable amount of smoke. Investigators are not sure what caused the containers to catch on fire. The center was reopened to students the next day, no formal damage estimate was made about the fire.

Another fire occurred last July in the dining hall. According to a report, a cutting torch caught the handling of a wall workmen were removing on fire. Damage was reported to be minimal.

Previous to these two fires, the last major fire on the A&M campus happened on January 26, 1963,

when the old president's home caught fire. Investigators said the fire apparently started around a chimney on a double fireplace between two sitting rooms. President Earl Rudder and his family were living in the house at the time but no one was hurt. The house was located across from the All Faiths Chapel and Sbis.

The home was built in 1893 at an estimated cost of \$4,500. According to documents from the University Archives, the old president's home was described at the time it was built as "an elegant mansion" typical of what "the well-to-do Texan built for his family in the gay nineties."

The Victorian character of the old building could be seen by its gable ornament, highly decorated tower, and bay window. The elements took their toll of these features and in 1930 the porches were rebuilt which gave the house somewhat of a colonial look.

The building was first occupied by President Lawrence Sullivan

Ross and his family. Ten other presidents of A&M have lived there since.

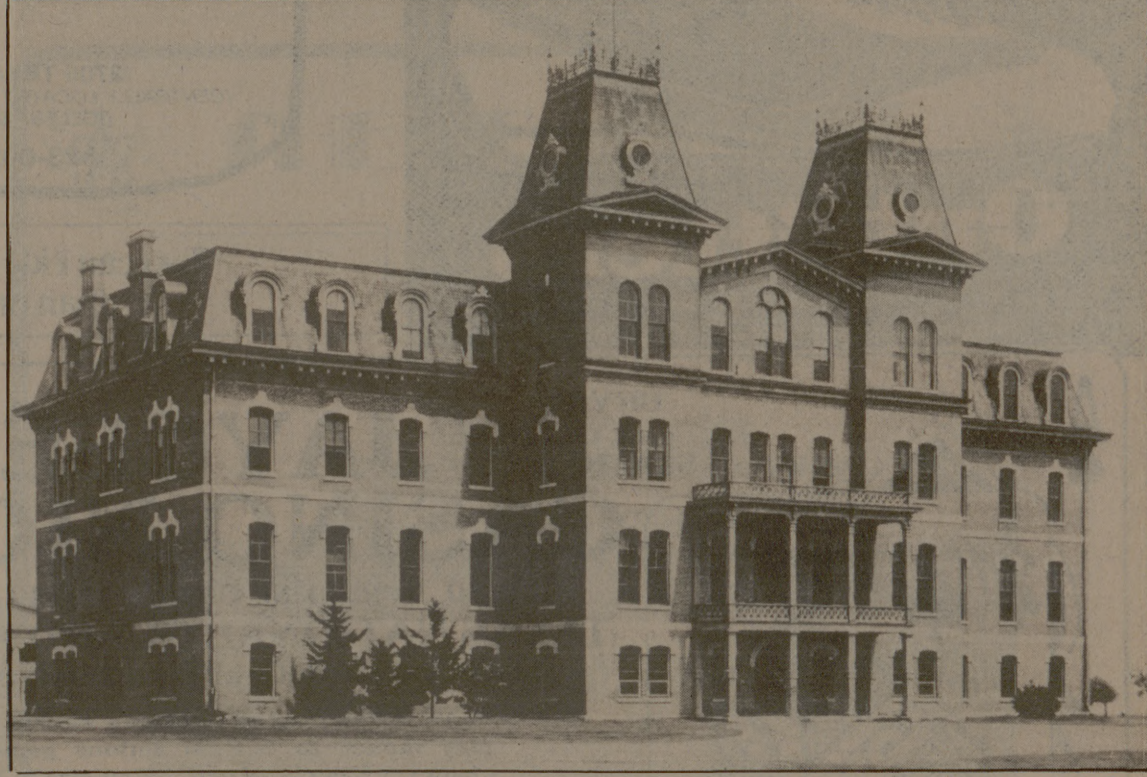
In May of 1912, Old Main was destroyed by a fire which started on the fourth floor, the cause of which is not known. The loss of the building and its contents was estimated at \$100,000.

Old Main was the first building completed on the campus and one of two which met all the students' needs for the first decade of Texas A&M's service. Gathright Hall, which served as the residence hall, together with Old Main, greeted students for the opening of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1876. The two buildings and several faculty residences were the Texas A&M College for about a decade.

Old Main housed all of the administrative offices, as well as many classrooms. According to University Archivist Ernest Langford, valuable records were lost in the blaze "that could be seen 20 miles away."

Less than a year earlier, the Mess Hall, which was constructed of brick, caught fire and was destroyed. The November 11, 1911, edition of the Houston Daily Post says "the fire was a spectacular one, many coming from Bryan to see it. Students got on top of surrounding buildings and with buckets of water kept the roofs wet so that no other buildings caught." The fire originated in the kitchen "where a vessel of grease on a range caught fire while breakfast was being prepared, and from this the hood over the range caught, spreading rapidly."

Three mess tents and supplies were sent from Austin to temporarily accommodate the students at mealtime.



Old Main, an administrative office building, burned down in 1912. Loss was estimated at \$100,000.

Bonfire danger Tradition sparks debate over site

By KAREN ROGERS
Battalion Staff

It just doesn't seem right talking about Bonfire during Fire Prevention Week. But as far as manpower used in enforcing safety procedures during the burning, maybe it is appropriate.

Bonfire, one of Texas A&M University's most well known traditions, is where students and friends of Texas A&M "show their undying love for A&M" and their burning desire to "Beat the hell out of t.u.!"

It is scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 28, and will stand 60 feet high, says Robert Luedker, one of the persons in charge of its construction.

All of the College Station Fire Department, some volunteers and city employees will be on duty the night of Bonfire to insure that Texas A&M and the city get adequate protection from flying embers.

Last year, Mayor Lorence Bravenec talked with Dr. John Koldus, vice president for student ser-

vices, about moving Bonfire because of traffic problems and the danger of surrounding buildings and houses catching on fire. Texas World Speedway was suggested as a probable site.

Bravenec's suggestion was opposed by Texas A&M students. Bravenec was not acting for the city council.

"The students said they didn't want it and that was that was the end of it," Bravenec said. He added he has no plans to bring the subject up again although he says he "still feels it is a mistake to put it there."

"It's hard to buck tradition in this town."

Gary Halter, College Station city councilman and past chairman of the Bonfire committee, said he would have mixed emotions about moving the bonfire.

He says that as a former student he understands the tradition, but if the fire were moved out into the

county, the cost of the fire protection would be borne by the county.

College Station does not charge the University for the additional protection. It costs the city about \$2,000 to hire the additional manpower for fire protection.

The city has five fire fighting units. All but two units are stationed around the Bonfire site, says Harry Davis, College Station fire marshal. Location of the units depends upon the direction of the wind on that day, Davis said.

"Until the day of Bonfire, there's no way to get an accurate enough weather report to know which way the wind is going to blow. Everything pinpoints on the weather."

Units are usually stationed at Duncan Dining Hall and the president's and chancellor's houses, he said.

"We give the University fire protection when we can. If it comes to the University or the homes across

the street catching fire, I would say we would pull everything we could from campus and put it across the street," Davis says.

An 8-10 block area south of the Bonfire site is cordoned off to insure accessibility of fire equipment. Davis says volunteers with phone books are stationed at entrances.

Changing wind directions cause the most problems, Davis said. A strong north wind could send embers south into the residential sections of the Bonfire site, while a south wind could blow embers back on the University.

A fire broke out on Duncan Dining Hall in 1975.

In 1964, several small fires and a major house fire broke out. A strong north wind blew burning embers into the wooded sections near Dexter Street, which caused more problems.

There have been no major mishaps since then.

'Hawkeye' watches for fires, intruders

Big brother is watching you. Well, not exactly, but Texas A&M is installing a security system which with the aid of two sets of sensors will be able to detect intruders or smoke.

"Hawkeye," a short wave transmission system which works on the same principle as the CB radio, has been installed in nine campus buildings.

Sensors are placed in "engineered locations," says James Presswood, University safety officer. He explained these were high value areas such as the Metzger gun collection in the Memorial Student Center and potential fire areas such as warehouses.

Should the sensors detect either an intruder or smoke, it sends a coded message to the University Police dispatcher and the emergency operator at the Physical Plants Building. It names the building and the location of the disturbance within the building.

The nine buildings on the Hawkeye system are the MSC, the Systems Physical Plants building, the Plant Sciences building, Beutal Health Center, Data Processing Center, Purchasing and Stores, the vet hospital, the golf pro shop and Heaton Hall.

Because of malfunctions in the past, the police department used to send someone to the location to see if assistance was needed. If it was, the operator at the Physical Plants Building would send for the College

Station Fire Department.

"Most of the time they go on and call out the fire engines," Russ McDonald, university police chief, said. "I would prefer they didn't until they check. A lot of this stuff we could put out ourselves."

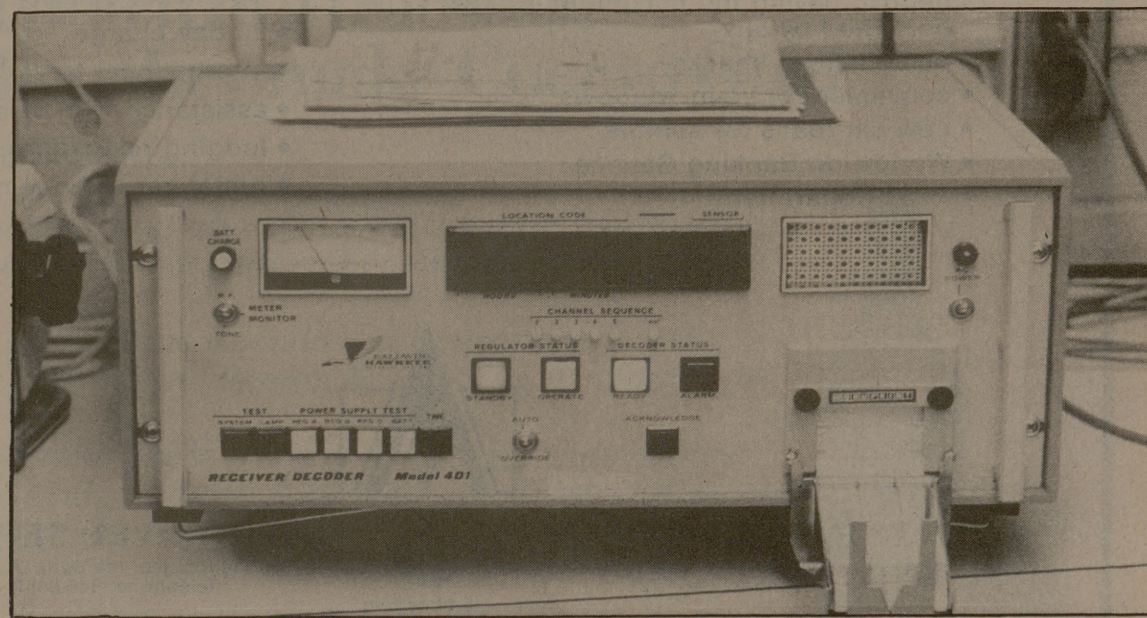
He explained that most of the

sensors caused by installation problems.

There are plans to put 60 additional buildings on the Hawkeye system, says Robert Stiteler, University safety officer; but he adds he does not know when the work will begin.

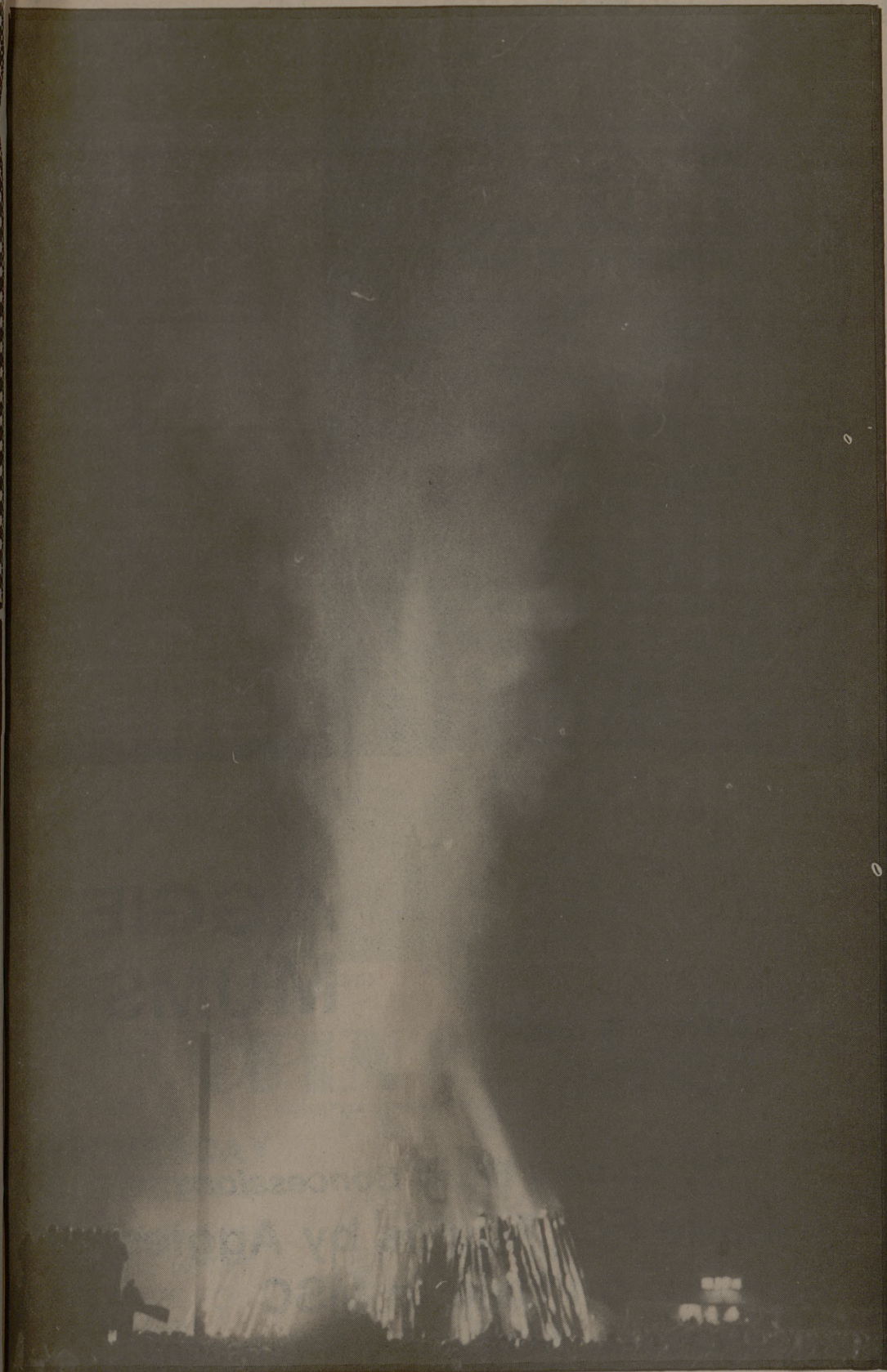
The original \$80,000 contract

with the Hawkeye system called for the system to be installed in 11 buildings. The system is not operational in two of the buildings it has been installed in. Stiteler says he does not have a projected cost for attaching the other buildings to the system. — Karen Rogers



The Hawkeye sensor system is designed to detect smoke and intruders in some campus buildings. Radio signals indicating the location of the disturbance are sent to one of two receiving units, shown here. An emergency operator then acts on the information the machine emits.

Battalion photo by Ed Cunniss



Battalion staff photo

Bonfire, probably the best know Aggie tradition, is held each year before the Texas Texas A&M game so that Texas A&M students and their friends can show their undying love for the University. This year's Bonfire is scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 28.