

Toomer's Corner Live Oaks: How Old Are These Iconic Trees?

No one knows the trees' origin for sure. Based on the old photo below, at one time their age was estimated to be 130 years.



Intersection of College and Magnolia around 1899

Image from Logue and Sims – Auburn, A Pictorial History of the Loveliest Village

The large tree in the center of this photo is not likely a Live Oak. Even if it was a Live Oak, it's too close to the corner to be one of the current Toomer's Oaks, and recent research has revealed that this tree is not present in later photographs.

Study of the photographic record shows that large trees have graced the College and Magnolia boundaries of the Auburn campus for over a century. A few of these photos are shared here:



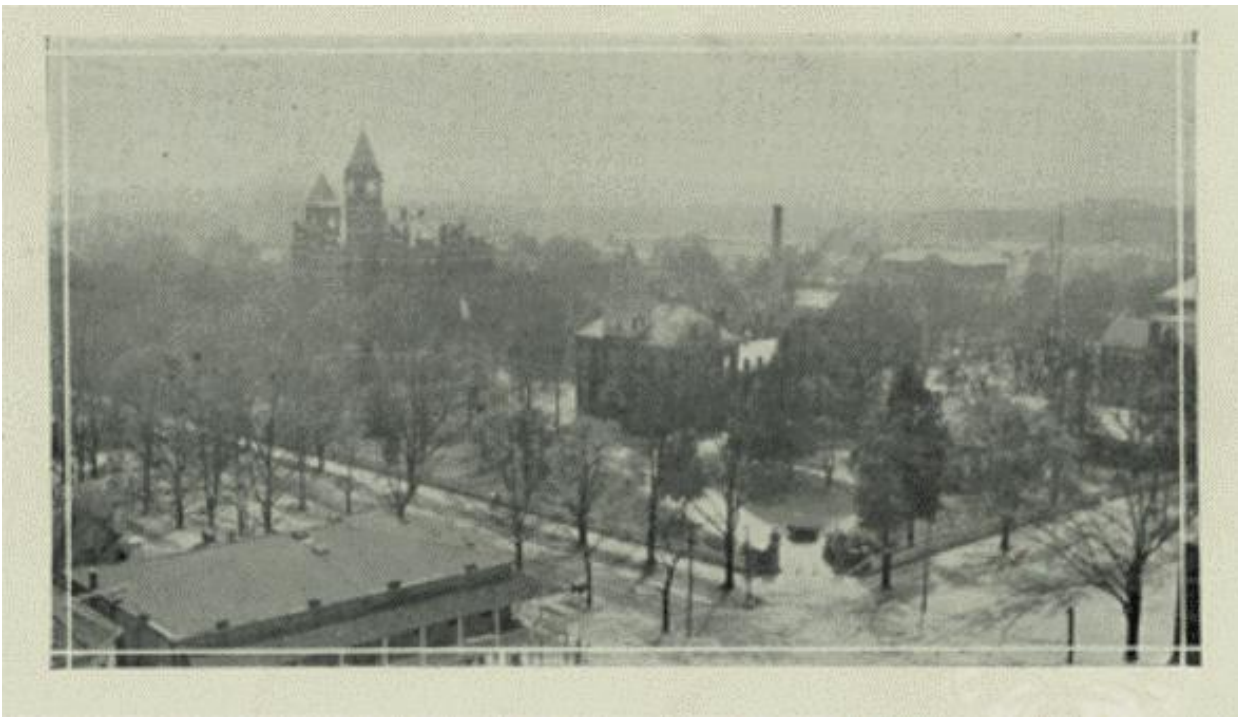
View of Toomers Corner from New Main (Samford Hall)

Image from AU Special Collections and Archives



Facing south along College Street from corner at Magnolia Avenue
Image from 1900 Glomerata

What a peaceful walk it must have been in 1900 along the College Street border of the Auburn campus. The Chemistry Building (Hargis Hall) is visible on the right. There was no entrance to the campus from the corner at College and Magnolia.



Auburn Campus with Main Gate (erected in 1917)
Image from 1924 Glomerata



Auburn Main Gate
Image from 1929 Glomerata

Note the two large trees between the gate and the streets, neither of which is a live oak.



Image from Special Collections and Archives print dated January 9, 1937

This photo was donated to Auburn University by George E. McWhorter, Jr. of Monterey, Virginia. George made the photo in Jan. 1937 while an API freshman. He later served in World War II. Note that the large trees previously at the corner had been removed and the Toomer's Oaks had yet to be planted.



1938 Orange Bowl Celebration

Image from Logue and Sims – Auburn, A Pictorial History of the Loveliest Village

A large copy of this photo is displayed in Toomers Drugstore. The Tigers won the January 1, 1938 Orange Bowl 6-0 over Michigan State, still an Orange Bowl record for fewest points scored, tallying 13 first downs to MSU's 2 first downs, and outgaining the Spartans 312 yards to 57 yards. In this photo, students and townspeople are shown gathering to welcome the returning football team on January 4, 1938.

This photograph appears to show a very young Toomer's Oak close to College Street (see arrow); the Toomer's oak closer to Magnolia Avenue is more difficult to see, but it is unlikely the trees were planted at different times. This young tree is about 8 to 12 feet tall and would be 6 to 10 years old, depending upon how it was grown. Aged oaks are definitely not present.

A number of Auburn faithful, concerned about the difference between the popular Toomer's Oak story and what this photograph showed, conducted independent research into what the photographic record could tell us about the Toomer's Oaks.

It is believed that photographs indicate that the Toomer's Oaks were planted between 1937 and 1939 but probably in 1937. The Toomer's Oaks are over 70 years old and had plenty of years remaining in their life expectancy prior to being poisoned.



Image from Special Collections and Archives negative dated April 23, 1939

The arrows on these two photos indicate young Magnolia Avenue and College Street Oaks.



Image from Special Collections and Archives print identified as October 1942



Image from 1946 Glomerata



Image from 1957 Glomerata

The Toomer's Oaks have graced the corner of College and Magnolia for a very long time. They've become a part of Auburn, just like we became a part of Auburn during our time here. And Auburn became a part of us. That's why it's difficult for us to lose the trees.

Our grandfathers enjoyed their time on the corner without the Toomer's Oaks. We've enjoyed our time on the corner with the Oaks. Our grandchildren may not have the Oaks but they will surely gather at the corner.

Enjoy the photo below from the 2010 win over Alabama and read the lines from a ditty written for the 1908 Glomerata by students who frequented a popular café at Toomer's Corner.



It is the common rendezvous
Just after every Auburn game.
Where soothing "dope" doth freely flow-
"Hot air", cool bev'rage, just the same.

And if we've won the victory,
We sing and yell and squall;
It makes the "children" laugh and play
To win a game of ball.

from the 1908 Glomerata

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Image from Hal Smith

Photographs courtesy of the Auburn University Libraries Special Collections and Archives. Information for this update provided by John T. Bryant (AU '83), Hal Smith (AU '84), and Steven Dixon (AU 2008).