

The Collegian

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It was a hot story.

Nichols Gymnasium was burning late Friday night, Dec. 13, 1968, and word was spreading almost as fast as the fire itself. Gathering in the light of the blazing structure, the Collegian staff decided to put out an extra edition for the next day.

Jim Morris, associate professor of journalism and mass communications, was director of Student Publications, Inc. at the time and his permission was needed before the group could start. He granted it but said he had nothing to do with producing the extra.

Most of the organizing was done by the editor, Liz Connor, Morris said.

According to Ernie Murphy, a Collegian staff member and now with the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury, Connor grabbed the staff and said, "We're going to try to put out a newspaper. Get your act together and get to Kedzie Hall."

MURPHY SAID little news was known at the time and the four-page extra consisted mostly of pictures. Most of the staff wasn't called in, but either went by Nichols or learned about the fire through word of mouth.

"I think there were quite a few people who just sort of wandered in and went to work," Laura Scott, now with the Kansas City Times, said. Scott served as editorial page editor for the Collegian but did not play a key role in the extra.

Some Collegian editors were at a party, known as a "Kedzie Kaper," that night when they learned of the fire, and went to the scene.

According to Kerwin Plevka, a Collegian photographer in 1968 and now with the Independence (Mo.) Examiner, it was a team effort among the staff members to get pictures working

recall shooting," he said, adding he was the first photographer on the scene and didn't think the fire would amount to much when he first saw it.

"The fire was pretty localized at first and it looked like it wouldn't amount to much," Plevka said. But then it started to spread and explode.

"The thing was rigged — it spread pretty fast," Plevka recalled. "It went up like a tinderbox."

Jim Parrish, assistant news editor of the Collegian at the time, said it wasn't much trouble to put out the extra.

"WE HAD no trouble getting people to rise to the occasion," he said. "It was just a matter of a special edition."

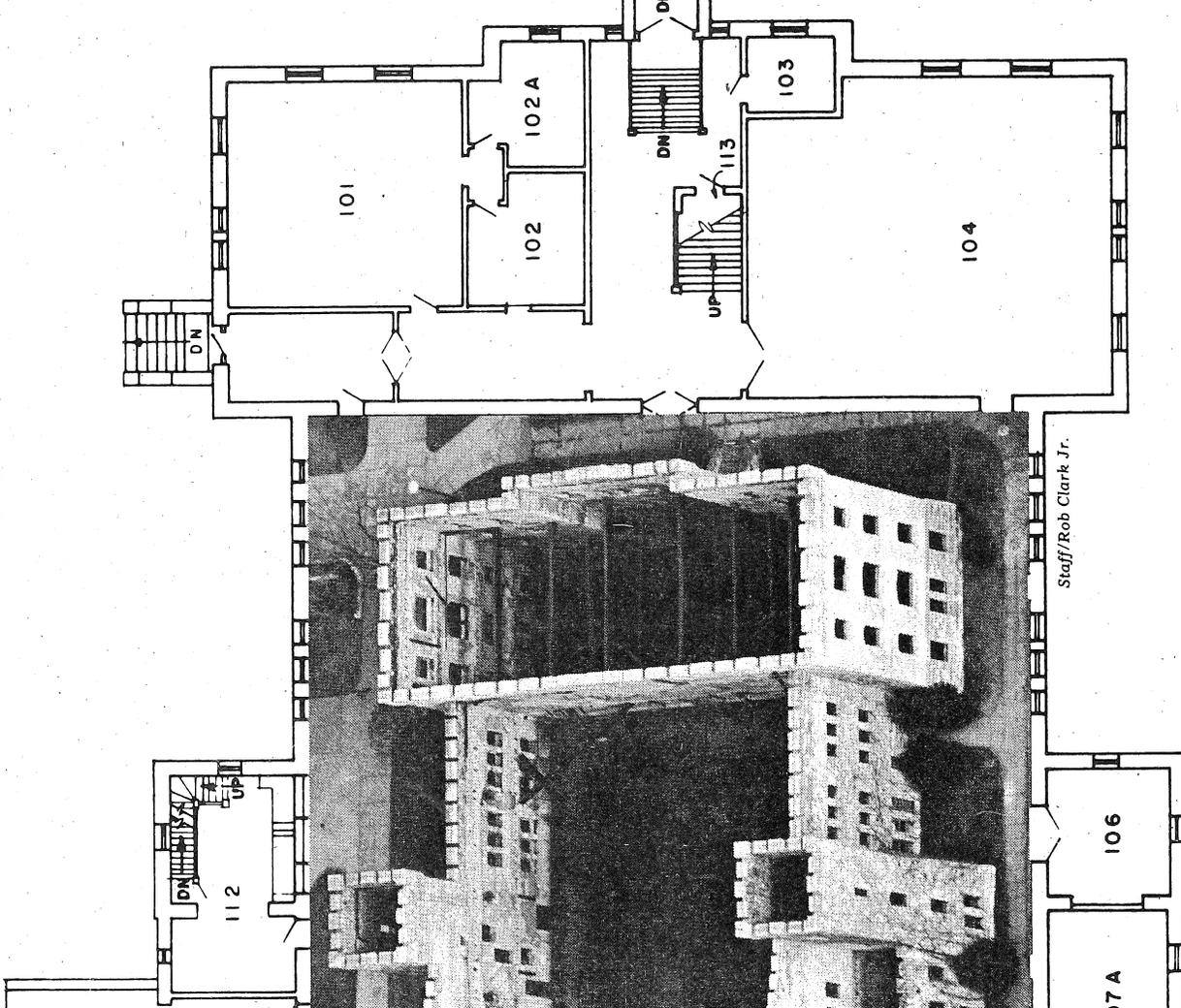
The lead story for the paper was written by Tom Palmer, now with the Boston Globe, who said he spent most of the night at the scene of the fire.

One of the most vivid memories Palmer has of the night is sitting in the editor's office with wet pants, shoes and socks, typing away at his story.

"Word went out about the fire very, very fast that night," he said. "I don't think we had to call anybody. There were plenty of people, given the limited production that we had."

According to Palmer, the longest part of the night was waiting for the extra to come out after it had gone to press. The pages were pasted up early Saturday morning and the extra rolled off the press about 11 a.m.

THE PAPER consisted of two major articles: Palmer's story headlined "Midnight Flames Engulf Nichols," which described the fire, and an interview with officials on campus about the blaze, headlined "KBI Seeks Blaze Origin." The story contained interviews with State Fire Marshal Authur Ramey and James McCain, president of K-State, at



Staff/Rob Clark Jr.

...s awaits approval

Although extra space has been acquired a little at a time, Wallentine said it is not contiguous

to new location