

# Acker's 1979 decision to raze Nichols ignites rallies from students, faculty

By MELINDA BRZON  
Collegian Reporter

"The early mourning crowd shuffled through the dew-wet grass in front of Anderson Hall Wednesday morning, slowly falling in behind a huge black and white banner as it was carried through the area."

This was the Collegian's description of Oct. 15, 1969, Moratorium Day. The banner the students carried read, "That the young may live — peace now."

In a time when other universities were making headlines for demonstrations against the Vietnam War, K-State remained silent. Moratorium Day was the University's chance to march for peace — silently.

Almost a year earlier, on Dec. 13, 1968, some of these marching students had remained still as Nichols Gymnasium burned.

K-State students in 1968 were described by the Kansas City Star as "naive" and "in need of enlightenment" for their lack of "physical protest" during the Vietnam War.

ALTHOUGH THE unsettled spirit of the 1960s was never quite as apparent in K-State students as in other students of that time, it seemed that a bit of the 60s came alive on campus in the spring of 1979 to jolt some students into rallying against President Duane Acker's decision then to destroy what remained of Nichols.

At 1:30 p.m. April 4, 1979, students and faculty converged on Anderson Hall to protest Acker's recommendation to the Legislature to demolish Nichols.

"To raze the 68-year-old gym and erase the 10-year-old 'monument of indecision' was Acker's recommendation to the state Legislature in 1979, as reported by the Collegian.

Chies of "We want Duane" by approximately 800 people could be heard that April day. Acker never showed. He wasn't in Anderson Hall. He was giving an address in Emporia.

A COPY OF the Office of Information's release of Acker's decision was read. Also read to the crowd was a letter to Acker from Greg Musil, student body president at the time.

Chet Peters, vice president for student affairs, spoke to the crowd that afternoon in Acker's absence.

"I thought it was a wholesome, genuine response by a good number of people who felt fairly strongly about the issue," Peters said.

"I like to see the interest when it's a real issue if there's something we can do to resolve it and if the students are searching for a resolution that seems reasonable. They were searching for a resolution. At least

those there didn't want that building torn down," he said.

The crowd dispersed only to return later in the afternoon. Acker returned. The Collegian said, "Acker met with the boos and catcalls of the crowd..."

ACKER ADDRESSED the crowd only to confirm that he would not retract his recommendation to raze Nichols.

Some of the students who took part in the 1979 protests are still at K-State.



University Photographic Services

Signed statements... Concerned about President Duane Acker's plans for Nichols Gymnasium, students aired their views at a protest April 4, 1979.

"It was a pseudo-mob scene," according to Bill Arck, director of Edwards Hall. However, Arck, who was in the Graduate School at the time of the protests, said the crowd wasn't violent.

"There were police on the steps who seemed anxious," Arck said, "but everyone else was just standing around."

A lot of people were there because there wasn't a cause at the time, Arck said, and Nichols gave them one. Arck said he thought the older faculty and architecture students seemed the most interested in saving Nichols.

On April 5, 1979, students took their case to the state Legislature.

ABOUT 120 K-State students and four student representatives "arrived at noon and gathered on the south steps of the capitol in Topeka," according to the Collegian. They read their official statement opposing the razing of Nichols.

Musil told Gov. John Carlin, "What we've been trying to get across is that the 1960s students were upset and they decided to burn it (the gym) down. The students of the 1970s would like to build it back up."

And Peters said of the campus and Topeka demonstrations:

"There was no demanding, no harsh dealing with it. They just said 'Hey, this is what we feel. We'd like to have you hear what we feel.'"

A "Nickels for Nichols" campaign was launched in 1979. In this campaign, each student was encouraged to donate a few cents to save Nichols. The money was needed to match the \$2,500 the state provided to pay for the feasibility study of Nichols going on at the time.

APPROXIMATELY 18,000 students were enrolled at that time, but only \$79 was raised by May 1979 for the campaign. The money was later stolen from a file drawer in Musil's office.

On May 10, 1979, a Collegian editorial by Debbie Rhein, editorial editor, said, "If students were really concerned about Nichols they would have contributed more