The 74-year-old building has been the focal point of protest marches, Collegian editorials, Castle Crusade — a campus group dedicated to the preservation of Nichols — and committees set up to study the feasibility of renovation.

Nichols, named after Ernest R. Nichols, president of K-State from 1899 to 1901, was discovered burning at 11:15 p.m. Friday, Dec. 13, 1968.

The previous day, a reportedly heated meeting between students and administrators had taken place. The confrontations, concerning student rights, was cited as the impetus for the arson; however, no one was ever charged in the incident.

The fire left the student operated radio station, KSDB-FM, Extension Radio and Television — which operated KSAC, the University's AM radio station — women's physical education and the Department of Music without a home.

Following the fire the four lampposts in front of Nichols, given to the University by the Class of 1913, were moved to the pedestrian court north of Anderson Hall.

Nichols' two swimming pools, the only things within the charred walls considered salvageable, were renovated in the summer of 1969. Swimming lessons were taught until the completion of the Natatorium in 1972, at which time Nichols Gymnasium was boarded up.

The issue of what to do with the reinforced concrete walls covered by 2-foot thick pieces of limestone never died. Architecture students performed studies on renovation, and a "Save the Castle" petition was introduced to students in the early '70s.

Concern about Nichols' future moved in waves, but gained momentum in February, 1976, when Castle Crusade was recognized as a campus organization by the University Activities Board. The

The fire protection system utilizing Halon gas to replace the supply and smother the fire was proposed by Virgil Wallentine. The system was designed to detect a fire, heat detection, and release the gas to contain the fire. The gas is released into the room in about 5 minutes to fill the space. The system is used rather than sprinkler system to avoid damage to the equipment, he said.

The portion of Nichols occupied by the Department of Computer Science, the Department of Speech, and the Department of Music is considered a line-conditioning system. The system takes out high voltage power lines to protect the equipment in the event of a fire. Virgil Wallentine, head of the computer science department, said "the move gave us a professional appearance."

But Nichols has more to offer the department than just a professional look, and a place to call its own. Along with the building's interior, the department has gained space for experimental laboratory equipment. "Cool terming the facility "pretty close to state of the art." The space has an elevated floor, air conditioning and a Halon fire protection system, he said.

The three-story, oak-rich

1910

In June, construction workers laid the Nichols Gymnasium floor on a solid slab of reinforced concrete.