

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 1909, 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 confrontation, 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

architecture and coordinator of Castle Crusade, said that when it was founded, the small group was composed mostly of architecture students.

"A lot of people considered (Nichols) an architectural symbol of an era. The detail, the style, the location — there was a good reason for keeping it. We really put our hearts into this," Gibson said in a recent interview.

"The group tried to publicize the Nichols Gym situation," he said. "We didn't try to push any use for the building. We just worked on raising awareness for it and raising funds for it. We just tried to keep the issue alive."

Interest in Nichols increased again in April 1979, when President Duane Acker announced he would seek funds from the Kansas Legislature to raze the structure to use the space it occupied for other campus buildings.

The announcement touched off a protest, which took place on the south side of Anderson. About 800 student and faculty protestors filled Mid-Campus Drive and a portion of the Fairchild Hall lawn.

Greg Musil, student body president in '79, said there were many reasons for preserving the ivy-covered walls.

"Anybody who looks at it recognizes how unique it is, not only on campus, but in the state. It's a massive and impressive piece of history," Musil said. "Also, the best estimates we could get on short notice said that you could build within the walls for about the same price as it would take to construct an entirely new building. That's getting your cake and eating it too."

"K-State has a long history. But, people won't remember that unless they preserve it," he said.

Funding for the Nichols renovation was granted by the Legislature in 1981 and construction began in the fall of 1983. Although the multi-year



Nichols Hall, originally opened in 1911, has had a stormy past and

appropriation allotted nearly \$6.2 million for the project, the final cost of the renovation will be \$5.58 million, said Vincent Cool, associate director of planning for University facilities.

The restored building houses the Department of Computer Science, the Department of Speech and a collection of books and monographs from Farrell Library. To some extent, Nichols serves as a home for the computer science department.

"Being stuck in every nook and cranny of Fairchild doesn't do much for appearance," said Virgil Wallentine, head of the computer science department. "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 internal facelift, the department has gained space for experimental laboratory equipment. Cool termed 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 fire protection system uses halon gas to replace the supply and smother the fire, Wallentine said. When detectors sense a fire, buzzers alert occupants of the laboratory seconds to evacuate. After the gas is released into the room, the system is used rather than a sprinkler system to avoid damaging the equipment, he said.

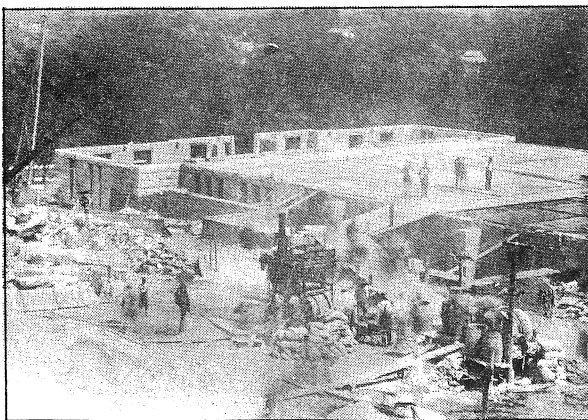
The portion of Nichols occupied by the department is also equipped with a line-conditioning system that takes out high voltage power lines to protect the equipment in the event of a surge, he said.

Another safety feature of the department is a battery back-up system for mini-computers in the building, which enables the department to save the mini-computer system in the event of a power failure.

In addition to ensuring the safety of high-tech equipment, renovation plans allowed for constructing aesthetically pleasing facilities.

The three-story, oak-rich

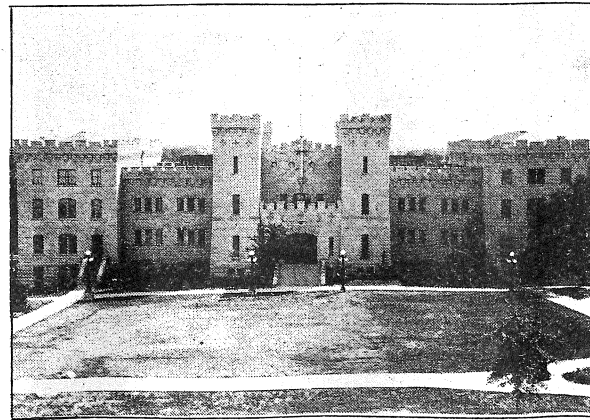
## 1910



University Archives

In June, construction workers laid the Nichols Gymnasium floor as a solid slab of reinforced

## 1911



University Archives

Following completion of Nichols Gymnasium, members of the junior class were given



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