
HISTORY OF KIRKLAND HALL

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY'S ICONIC EPICENTER

INTRODUCTION

Kirkland Hall is the iconic symbol of Vanderbilt University. It was dedicated in October, 1875, as the school year commenced for the school's first 307 students.¹

It served not only as administrative offices, as it does today, but as the central building on a fledgling 74-acre campus. It initially housed all the university's classrooms and laboratories in addition to a chapel, a museum and the library. It was one of only 10 buildings in the original construction program on campus.²

1. "The Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History" page 18

2. "Announcement of Vanderbilt University. First Session, 1875-6" page 17



INTRODUCTION

Originally known simply as the main building, it was designed by Nashville architect William C. Smith, who would later design the replica of the Parthenon for the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition. After a devastating fire in 1905 the two-towered, Victorian Gothic design was rebuilt in an Italianate style with a single 170-foot tower. Steel and concrete replaced wood in the reconstruction, and the 1907 university announcement declared the building “fireproof.”³

The building – which had been called Main Building, Old Main and University Hall – was renamed Kirkland Hall in honor of Vanderbilt’s second chancellor, James Hampton Kirkland, and his wife, Mary Henderson Kirkland, in 1937. Kirkland was chancellor for 44 years, and both the man and the building remain central to Vanderbilt’s history.

3. “Announcement for 1907-1908” page 20



MAIN BUILDING

This 1875 photograph is one of the earliest of the Main Building. Newly-planted saplings dot what had until then been a cornfield. The Main Building was built, according to the announcement of the first session in 1875, on acreage that can “from their elevation – on a level with Capitol Hill – afford fine views on every side, and furnish the fullest conditions of health.”

The two-horse carriage of Bishop Holland N. McTyeire, a founding member of the university and the first president of the Board of Trust, can be seen at right.



MAIN BUILDING

This view looking east from the top of one of the Main Building's towers is an expansive vista of Nashville's southern edge in the 1890s. The athletic field, now Curry Field, is at the bottom left, and Mechanical Engineering Hall, now part of the Owen Graduate School of Management, is at right.



MAIN BUILDING

An early engraving of the Vanderbilt Campus, prominently featuring the Main Building, shows the tower roofs in two different configurations. The reason for the change is not documented, but author and Secretary of the University Robert A. McGaw proposed in his 1978 book, *The Vanderbilt Campus: A Pictorial History*, that perhaps a leaking roof necessitated the change. Other notable buildings included in the engraving are the second Wesley Hall (burned down in 1932, but stood where Library Lawn is today), Old Science (Benson Hall), and the Old Gym (Vanderbilt University Office of Undergraduate Admissions).



THE FIRE OF 1905

From *Gone With the Ivy* by Paul K. Conkin

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RECONSTRUCTION

Workers sit and stand atop the steel chapel roof trusses that were used in the reconstruction of the gutted building to reduce the risk of fire. A reinforced concrete roof replaced the wood construction of the original building, and burn marks in the pattern of the original timber rafters can be seen scorched into the brick wall behind.

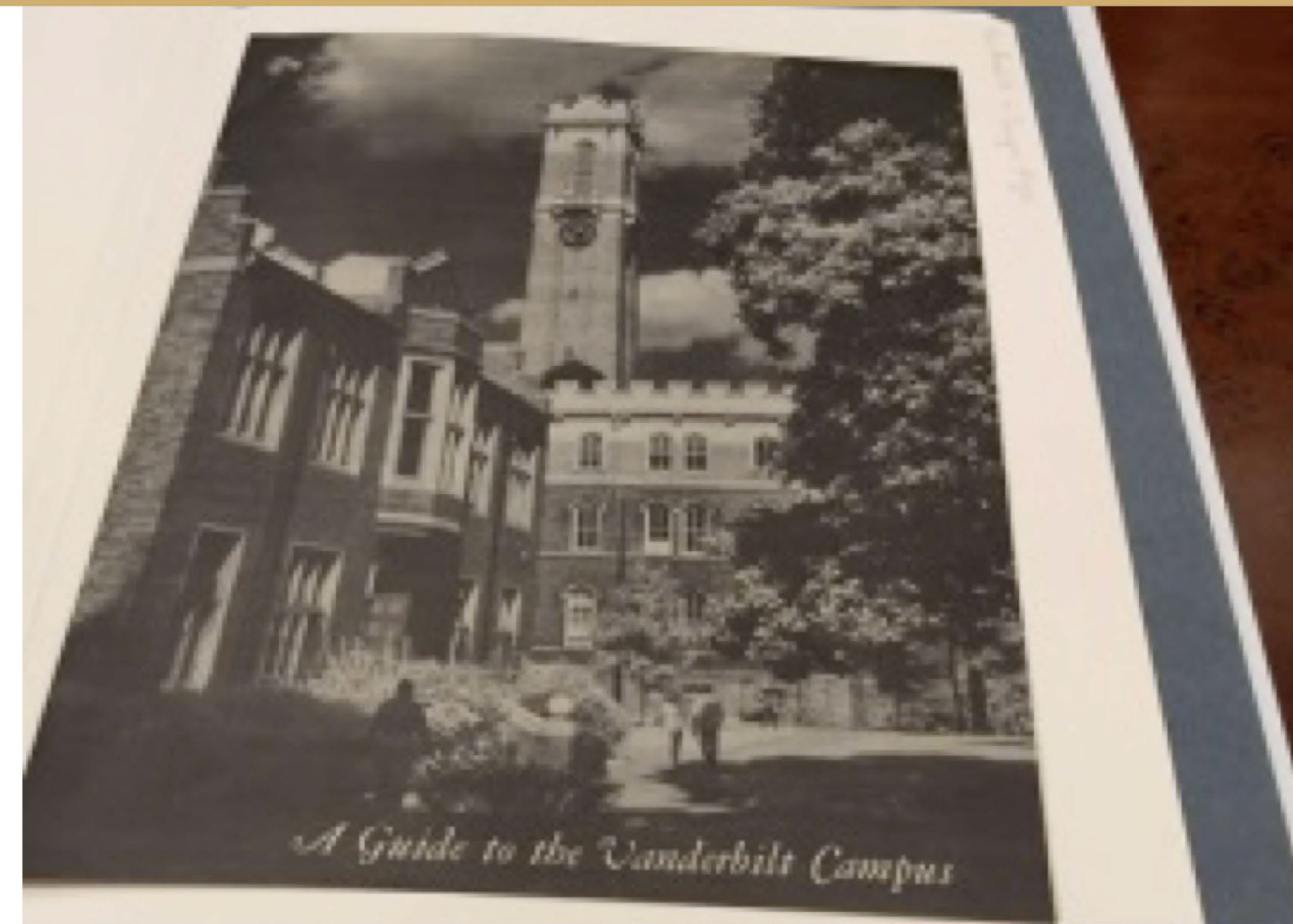
The largest single expense of the project was rebuilding the south tower. It was reconstructed from the bedrock up, as seen in these September, 1905, plans from architects Carpenter and Blair. The total cost of rebuilding had reached \$144,388 by 1908.

Members of the Vanderbilt community and residents of Nashville contributed \$50,000 to the restoration of the building, which was renamed College Hall after the fire. William Kissam Vanderbilt, Cornelius Vanderbilt's grandson, donated \$150,000. The children of Vanderbilt families even contributed \$553 to buy a new bell for the tower. The bell was cast with the inscription, "Gift of the children to Vanderbilt University – 1906 – Ring in the Nobler Mode of Life."



The Symbol of Vanderbilt

Kirkland Hall and its distinctive tower have been the architectural symbol of Vanderbilt University in publications, promotional material and on football tickets. A photograph of the building from the 1950s, shown here on “A Guide to the Vanderbilt Campus,” was used as the cover photo for the course catalogs of the College of Arts and Science for almost 20 years.



The Symbol of Vanderbilt

Kirkland Hall is undergoing a significant renovation that is reflective of the institution's purpose and commitment to excellence and sustainability. The renovation is aligned with the FutureVU campus planning framework and its core themes which includes accessibility and inclusion, connectivity and community enhancement, and sustainability.

Centric Architecture, a Nashville-based design firm, is leading the Kirkland Hall renovation. Centric recently completed the 6 Magnolia Circle, Mayborn and Connector buildings project on the Peabody campus, for which it received a Historic Preservation Award of Excellence from Associated General Contractors of America.

The renovation is currently underway, with all Kirkland-based employees working elsewhere for the duration of the project. The project's completion date goal is late 2023 or early 2024.

