HELPING TO BUILD A GREATER KU

February 24, 1965--Chancellor W. Clarke Wescoe announced today that he had personally inspected Fraser Hall and that the building was beyond repair. The structure will be closed at the end of the spring semester, he said, and will be razed as soon as possible after that.

No one protested the plans to destroy old Fraser, known as the "Athens on the Kaw", the buiding once deemed the finest and most progressive in all America" when built in 1872. Fraser was a condemned building. Its foundation rested on wooden supports, clay and shale; all of which had been badly shaken during the construction of new Blake Hall and the additions to Watson library. At least that was the argument given by state architect, James C. Canole and KU administrators.

It was a sad day when Chancellor Wescoe announced the impending destruction. Old Fraser was a greatly admired building with a rich history. The second chancellor of the University of Kansas, Gen. John Fraser, traveled the country for months studying the designs of buildings at other universities so that Lawrence could have the most beautiful structure in the land. The original three-story, 54-room building was built for $182,000 and it housed all of the classes and offices of the university.

Woodrow Wilson, Rutherford B. Hays, Ulysses S. Grant Gen. Sherman, Henry Ward Beecher and Franklin Roosevelt are among the famous people to address students in Fraser's fine auditorium. Movies were shown there also and at a reasonable price even into the 1960's... 35 cents bought an admission ticket in 1963. Thousands lulled in the seats of the auditorium to enjoy the melodic sounds of Fraser's pipe organ. The loft also had quite a reputation for being the campus necking parlor and for some time it was closed during the evening hours to prevent such activity.

March 29, 1965--Details and a picture of new Fraser appeared in the University Daily Kansan today. Response from professors, students and citizens both in Lawrence and across the country, insued quickly.

March 30. 1965--"Critics Castigate New Fraser Hall Design," read the headline in the Kansan. It was just the beginning of four months of controversy, protests, petitions, funeral processions, moratoriums and discussion. People had accepted the destruction of old Fraser, but the proposed replacement was abhorable.

In the end, Chancellor Wescoe, Vice Chancellor of Operations Kieth Lawton and the state architect, Canole, had the final say. New Fraser stands today in 1976 as a symbol of irrational, administrative action in complete disregard of the desires of the people. The story of concerned citizens' efforts to stop the construction of a building that was aesthetically a disaster and a perversion of the history linked to the man for which the building was named. It's a classic example of progress in the name of progress; mindless, irreversible, bureaucratic, decision making thoroughly removed from genuinely human values. The comments that follow appeared in the University Daily Kansan during the efforts to stop construction of new Fraser. They are testimonial to the destruction of beauty that has taken place in American society...destruction that continues today in Lawrence, Kansas.

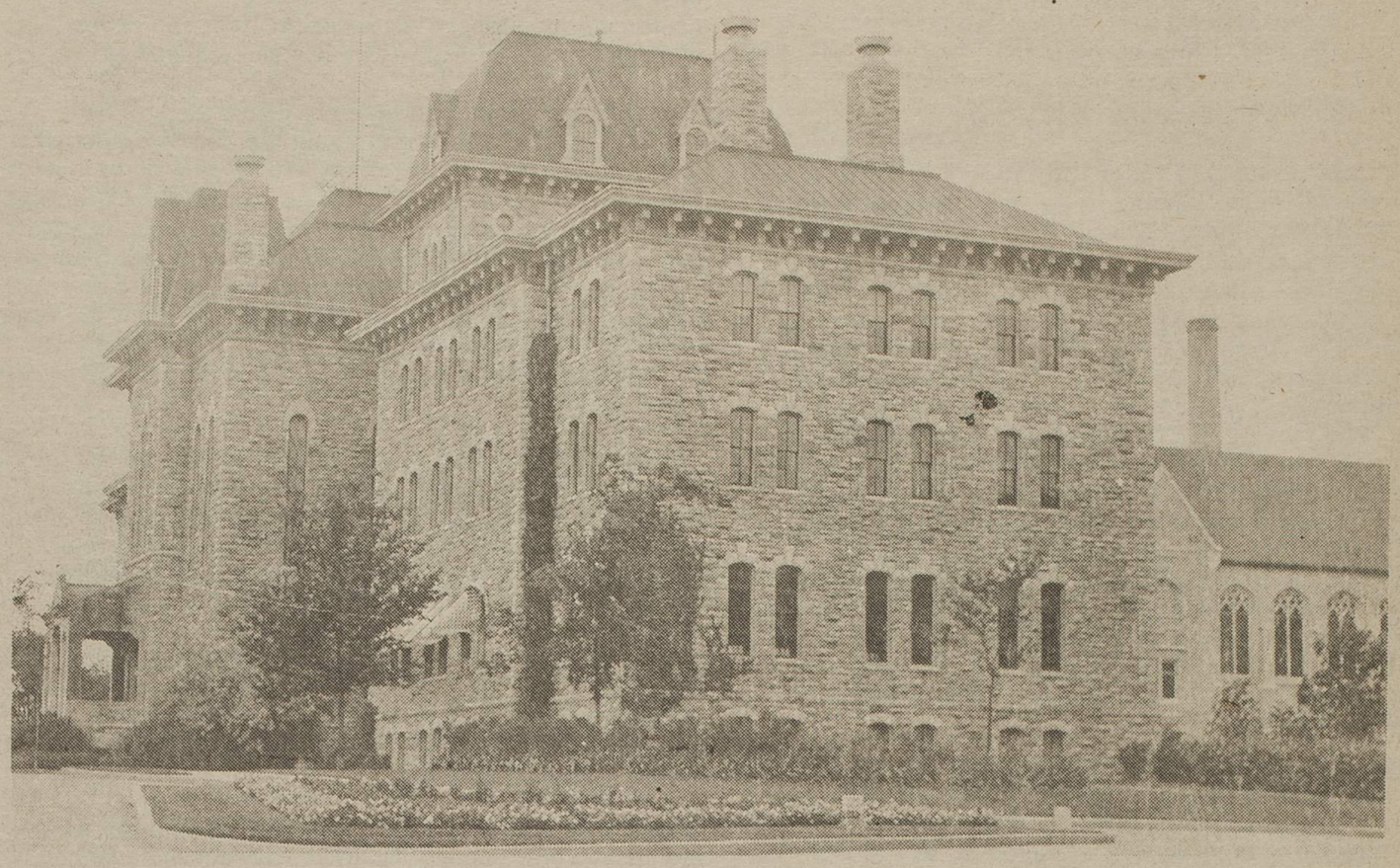
Robert Fuenther, associate professor of architecture, was just one of many in the School of Architecture to protest plans for new Fraser in 1965.

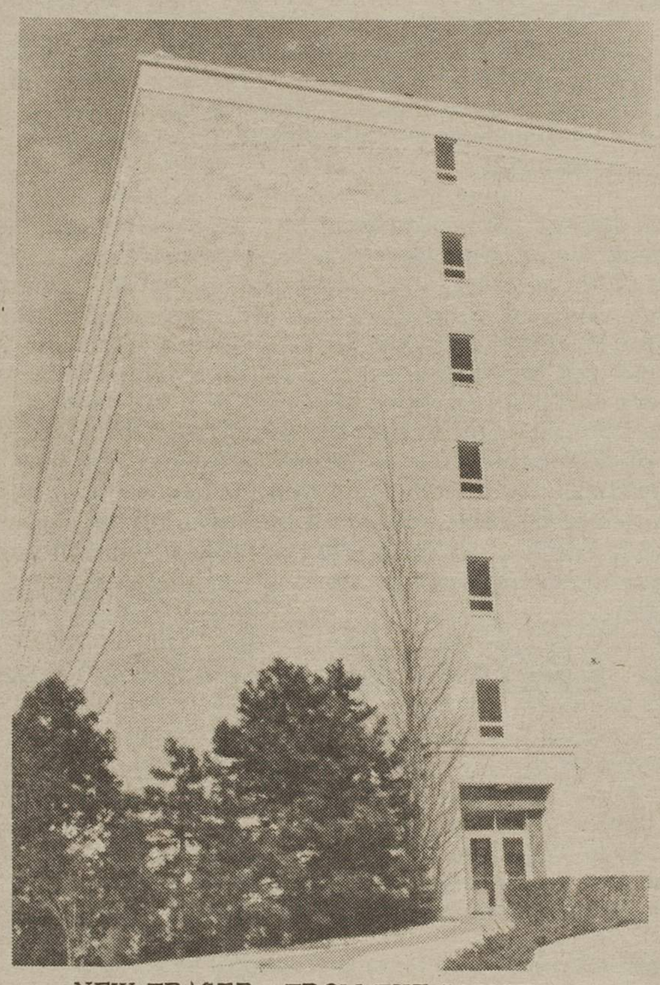
"It would be naive to evaluate that thing," he said. "It becomes a monument to bureaucracy. Take the roof off of it and it looks like one of those hotels in a Monopoly game."

NEW FRASER: MONOPOLY ANYONE ??

Architecture students at Kansas State University expressed their sympathy by sending a handmade wreath of red leaves with a painted black ribbon in recognition of new Fraser. About 70 architecture students demonstrated in front of Fraser and placed a black K-State wreath in front of the building. They asked for a delay in the construction and endorsement of a plan for architects to design a master campus building plan.

Chancellor Wescoe offered this comment at the demonstration, "For people that presume to be part of a profession, I find this to be very unprofessional."





NEW FRASER: FROM THE LUNCH-BOX SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Other comments that appeared in the Kansan expressed dismay and anger with the plans for new Fraser:

"My congratulations to R.T. Griest (one of the architects) of Topeka! He has managed to combine in one building, all the worst features of modern architecture and has capped it with a red roof. Granted that KU students have been somewhat unruly lately, but I hardly think it necessary to provide future buildings with guard towers suitable for searchlights and machine guns. As Chancellor Wescoe stated, the new Fraser and Blake will provide for many visitors the physical image of the university. With this as an image, how can KU hope to be considered a great institution? Unless, of course, those guard towers indicate planned transformation into a penal institution."

The designs for new Fraser arrived in the East and brought this comment from Gerald S. Berstein in Philadelphia, the former curator of the Art Museum and instructor in Art History at KU.

"In their mimicry, the towers only serve to insult the imaginative men who conceived and built original Fraser Hall. Those of you who do care and are yet unwilling to pressure for a more meaningful design will live with this structure. Worse, you will force your children to live with it. To construct the new Fraser as designed is to show not only our lack of understanding of our times, but also our lack of the initiative to care."

To all of this, Chancellor Wescoe responded on May 5 saying in essence that new Fraser must and would be built as planned.

"We've planned it for two years and we cannot abandon the plans and hope to meet our space requirements. We can't go back to the beginning."

And so, we the survivors of the turbulent '60s remain and so does new Fraser, picturesquely located on the highest point on beautiful Mount Oread.

Lasting Reminders

SENATOR ROBERT DOLE VISITS--"I thought Drake University was the most beautiful campus," Mary Elizabeth Dole, the new wife of Sen. Dole, exclaimed at a Kansas Day reception in the Kansas Union, "but you all have a very beautiful campus. This is my first visit to your campus, but I hope to return in the spring when it's in full bloom."

WEST SIDE STORY--I ramble down the wooded slope north of the Aerospace Building on the West Campus of the University of Kansas. The soft, wet earth clings to my tennis shoes. I dodge low hanging branches and thorny bushes. No tranquility to be found in this wilderness. Iowa street traffic rumbles to the east. Vroom! Vrooom! Two motorcycles kick clods of mud as they are driven up and down the piles of dirt which will soon be used to bury the ever-growing trash pile.

I long for isolation. Ravens fly above my head. A squirrel scampers through the underbrush. The illusion of nature evaporates. At the bottom of the slope I gaze up at the university grave yard. Three kids are crawling up the side of the KU trash pile. Stagnate pools of water full of soggy cardboard boxes, empty tape reels, broken bottles and paper prevent me from climbing up the mountain of debris. Here lie the discards from an institute of higher learning. I finally find a place to cross the only creek on the campus. Somethings smells rotten.

"Hey, c'mere!"

A boy of about 10 kicks an empty box, once the home of an IBM Selectric typewriter, down toward the woods. In funny, awkward steps his two buddies trudge through the rubbish to see what their friend has discovered.

I walk around the trash pile and up on the black earthen grave which hides the university's garbage archive. But, I had come to see the buildings.

To the north, great piles of broken, yellowing limestone lie in naked disarray. In search of old Fraser, Blake and Robinson I walk around and around the stones. I didn't know these old stones personally. Others visit the buildings with personal recollections of the campus that is no more. But I bring only memories of library photographs, yellowing newspaper clippings and a film of the fine old structures.

Buildings and grounds workers come here to sort the stones. Fine arts students pick at the remains. Grand buildings become rubble, become garbage, become sculptures.

I climb to the top of one of the limestone mounds. Old Fraser, maybe? To the east on Daisy Hill, McCollum, Ellsworth, Templin, Hashinger and Lewis stand like computer cards on edge. Hundreds of square, key-punch windows stare blankly toward the west. Once a favorite spot to sit in Daisies and Daisies and Daisies to view the campus below, is now bustling with shiny automobiles, asphalt and parking slots.

Blake Hall was wrecked in the spring of 1963. Two years later Fraser Hall went. They did it with a huge steel ball and many people came to watch. But they say that the people loved old Fraser. They protested the plans for new Fraser and the historic event was recorded in area newspapers and on film. I guess tragedy attracts many.

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