

Vanderbilt University, West Side Row
Corner of West End Avenue and
24th Avenue South
Vanderbilt University Campus
Nashville
Davidson County
Tennessee

HABS No. TENN-34

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TENN-34

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY, WEST SIDE ROW

Location: Corner of West End Avenue and 24th Avenue South, Vanderbilt University Campus, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee
Latitude: 36°08'53" Longitude: 86°48'20"

Present Owner and Occupant: Vanderbilt University

Present Use: Building A contains the Office of Student Life and the Vanderbilt Housing Office; Buildings B and C are apartments for Vanderbilt personnel; Building D houses the Vanderbilt Student Association and the Office of Cultural Affairs; Building E is the office of the University Press.

Statement of Significance: These five buildings were erected as dormitories for Vanderbilt University in 1886 and 1887. They represent an early venture in student housing, when campus residence by students was less common than in later years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1886 and 1887.
2. Architect: Oliver H. Landruth, designer and supervisor of construction.
3. Original and subsequent owners: When Vanderbilt University opened for classes in October 1875, there were no dormitories, such being considered "injurious to morals and manners." Three years later the Minutes of the Board of Trustees record that "Seeing the necessity of boarding houses for students near the grounds of the University, and desiring to be in condition to command room for such buildings at all times, the Executive Committee have purchased a few lots in the rear of the University grounds, and adjoining them, sufficient for the purpose, price \$1500.00. These lots have been set with trees, and sown in grass; and may be used by leasing or building as the future dictates."

In the June 14, 1886, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, H. N. McTyeire, President of the Board, reported: "Shortly

before his sudden death, Mr. Vanderbilt /William H. Vanderbilt/ sent me a check for \$10,000 to be used at my discretion, for the library or for other University interests. Consulting with the Executive Committee, it was thought best to build four dormitories on the Western part of the campus, accommodating sixty four students and yielding a rental at 6% per annum on the original sum to be used for library purposes."

As the contract called for completion of the buildings by August 15, evidently a great deal of prior planning had been underway. The buildings were designed and their construction supervised by Oliver H. Landruth, Professor of Civil Engineering at Vanderbilt. Professor Landruth was elected Professor of Civil Engineering May 29, 1879. He received \$500 for his work on the dormitories.

The four brick buildings erected in 1886 each had two stories and contained eight rooms. No two rooms connected; all had outside entrances. One chimney with eight flues served each building. The structures were named Alpha, Bellevue, Cumberland, and Delphi.

The following year--June 13, 1887--Bishop H. N. McTyeire reported to the Trustees "We shall have six dormitories . . . a dining room is being erected . . . this whole outfit, seven brick buildings will have cost when finished about \$22,000 exclusive of the land." The two new dormitories, also designed by Professor Landruth, were identical to the other four and were named Euclid and Franklin.

4. Alterations and additions; These six buildings continued as dormitories until 1956 when they were converted to offices or apartments. Alpha was torn down in 1966 to make room for Carmichael Towers, a new men's dormitory. The remaining five survive, as does the dining hall referred to above, which is now the Naval ROTC Building.

The buildings preserve their original appearance and form, although connecting doors and other modifications have been made on the interior to adapt the spaces to modern use. Also many of the side entrances have been bricked in.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structures:

William H. Vanderbilt, whose gift made possible the West Side Row Dormitories, was a generous benefactor of Vanderbilt University. His father, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, gave a million dollars to build and endow the University, which was founded in 1873.

Holland N. McTyeire, who authorized the construction of the buildings, was a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was the man entrusted by Cornelius Vanderbilt with establishing the University and was the first President of its Board of Trustees.

C. Sources of Information:

Mims, Edwin. History of Vanderbilt University. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1946, pp. 114, 137, 249.

Nashville, Tennessee. Joint University Libraries. Special Collection. The John James Tigert Papers, 1824-1957.

Nashville, Tennessee. Joint University Libraries. Vanderbilt University Archives. "Seventy Years After" /by Owen H. Wilson/.

Vanderbilt University. Announcements for Vanderbilt University, 1878-1956.

Vanderbilt University. Board of Trustees. Minutes, Vols. I and II.

Prepared by John W. Kiser
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1971

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: These five brick dormitory buildings with "carpenter Gothic" details are examples of student housing in the 1880s, when residence on campus was less common than in later years.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Each of these five free-standing brick structures is 35 feet square and has two stories. The front facade has four bays on the first floor.
2. Foundations: Tennessee limestone.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: Natural finish brick (common bond).
4. Structural system: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: There are stone steps and a landing in front of the paired lower-level entrances. Over these entrances a two-bay gabled hood with finial and pendants is supported on three brackets. Its raking cornices are carved and pierced, the end cornices are scalloped, and the horizontal and vertical braces at the front are chamfered.

On the two side facades of each structure there is an outside staircase of decorative wrought and cast iron leading to a platform outside the second-floor entrance(s). Each stairway has a decorative newel post and a handrail with balusters which extends around the second-floor platform.

6. Chimneys: Each structure has a large center brick chimney with corbeled cap and decorative brickwork. The chimney had eight flues which served the eight fireplaces within (most of the fireplaces are closed).
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: In Building D there are five segmentally arched recessed doorways (two on the lower level and three on the upper level). Each contains a horizontal one-light transom over a four-pane wooden door (in general, two tiers of molded panels).
 - b. Windows and shutters: The window openings are segmentally arched and contain four-over-four-light double-hung sash.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: A gable and jerkin-head roof.
 - b. Cornice and eaves: A simple cornice and overhanging open eaves. Scalloped bargeboards on one structure.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Originally a four-room plan on each floor, the interiors have been modified. In Building A, for example, each floor has two bedrooms with a connecting bath, a living room, a dining area, and a small kitchen.

2. Stairways: No interior stairways.
3. Flooring: Recent narrow oak flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paper on plaster over brick.
5. Doorways and doors: Two-panel (late) wooden doors.
6. Lighting: Electric lights.
7. Heating: Steam heat and radiators. Most of the fireplaces have been covered over. (In Building A, a fireplace has been opened on the second floor and is in use.)

D. Site:

The five structures are located on the Vanderbilt University campus in a setting of trees, shrubs, and lawn.

Prepared by Roy C. Pledger
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
July 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the summer of 1971 as part of a cooperative project of the National Park Service, the Tennessee Historical Commission, and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. The work represented the second phase of an extensive recording program to document the historic architecture of Middle Tennessee and involved the recording of structures in the counties surrounding Nashville.

The project was under the direction of James C. Massey, at that time Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Supervisor of the recording team was Prof. Roy C. Pledger of Texas A&M University. The team was composed of John W. Kiser, Architectural Historian (University of Tennessee); Daryl P. Fortier, Architect (University of Minnesota); and student architects Gilbert M. Glaubinger (Rhode Island School of Design), Steve P. Roberts (Ohio State University), and Barry S. Williams (Texas A&M University). Photographs were made by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer.