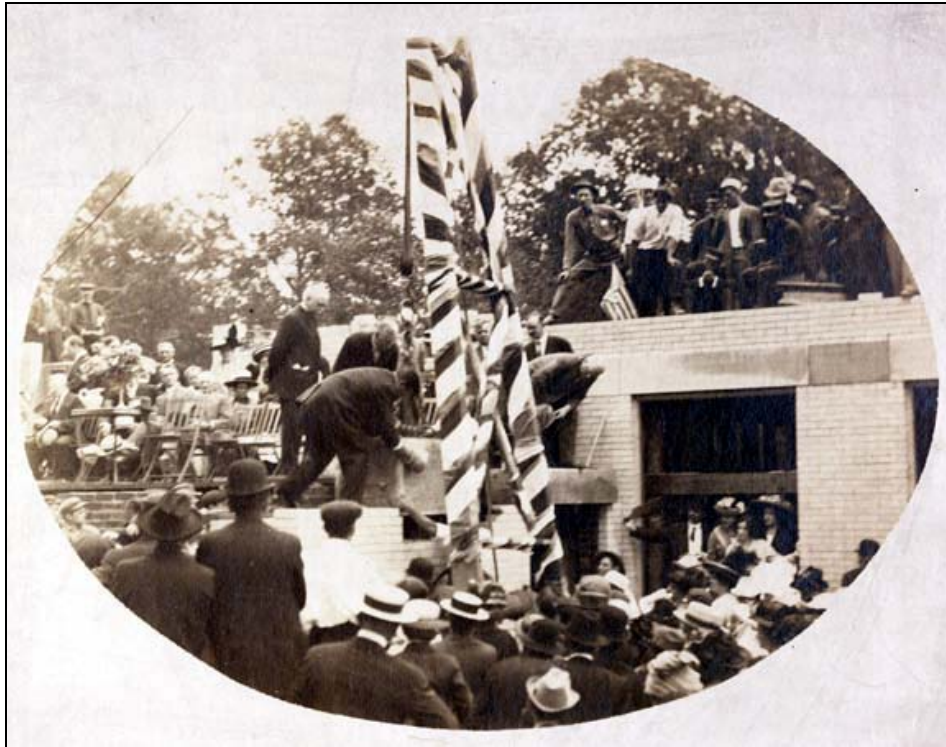


A History of Kent Hall

F. Robert Treichler

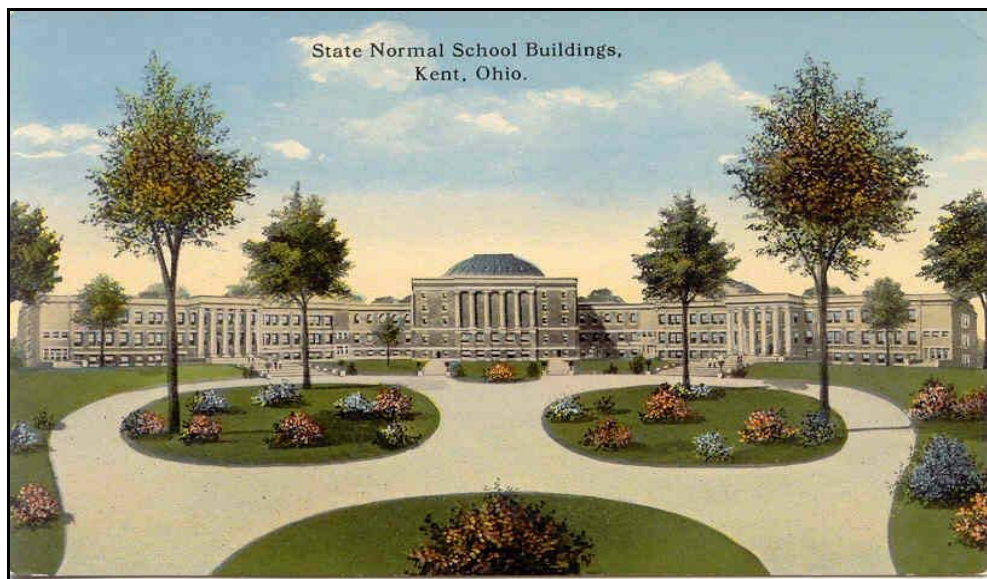
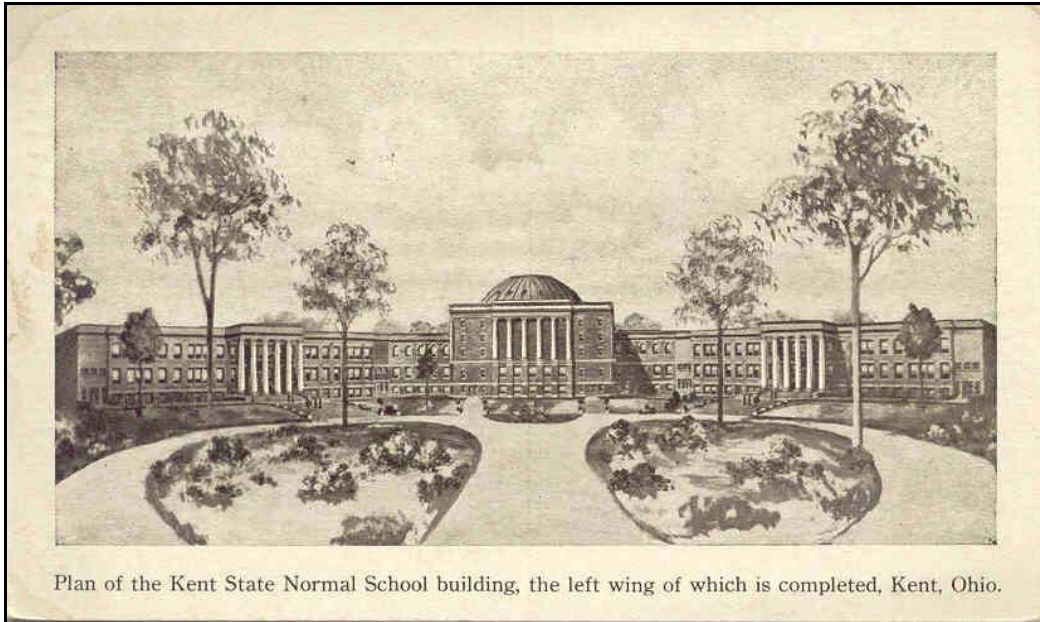
Breaking Ground

Although its seal proclaims 1910 as the founding date for Kent State, the first structure to become a part of the institution was begun with a grand cornerstone laying ceremony at Merrill Hall on June 18, 1912. To celebrate that event, the stores in town were closed and a band led marchers and vehicles out E. Main St. to the site.



This construction was initiated by action of Kent State's first board of trustees on June 17, 1911, when three important steps in establishing the school were taken. On that date, a name for the institution was decided (because of Wm. S. Kent's donation of 53 acres of land from his family's farm – almost 2/3 of the campus then), a president was selected (John E. McGilvery), and an architect was chosen (George F. Hammond of Cleveland). By August 11, the board accepted Hammond's plans for the first two buildings, and a month later the legislature awarded \$150,000 to the R. H. Evans Co. of Columbus to construct and equip an instructional building and a dormitory. Both Merrill (named for the first chairman of the board of trustees) and Lowry Halls (named for the NW Ohio legislator who sponsored the bill creating Kent and Bowling Green as normal schools) were begun in the summer of 1912 and were close enough to completion to be opened for the summer session of 1913.

President McGilvery, always a visionary, harbored the prospect that Kent would one day become a great university, and he instructed George Hammond to generate an architectural master plan to reflect that goal. The plan involved a symmetrically balanced set of buildings located along the ridge to the west of the then-present structures (as depicted in some black & white and color postcards of the era – see next page).

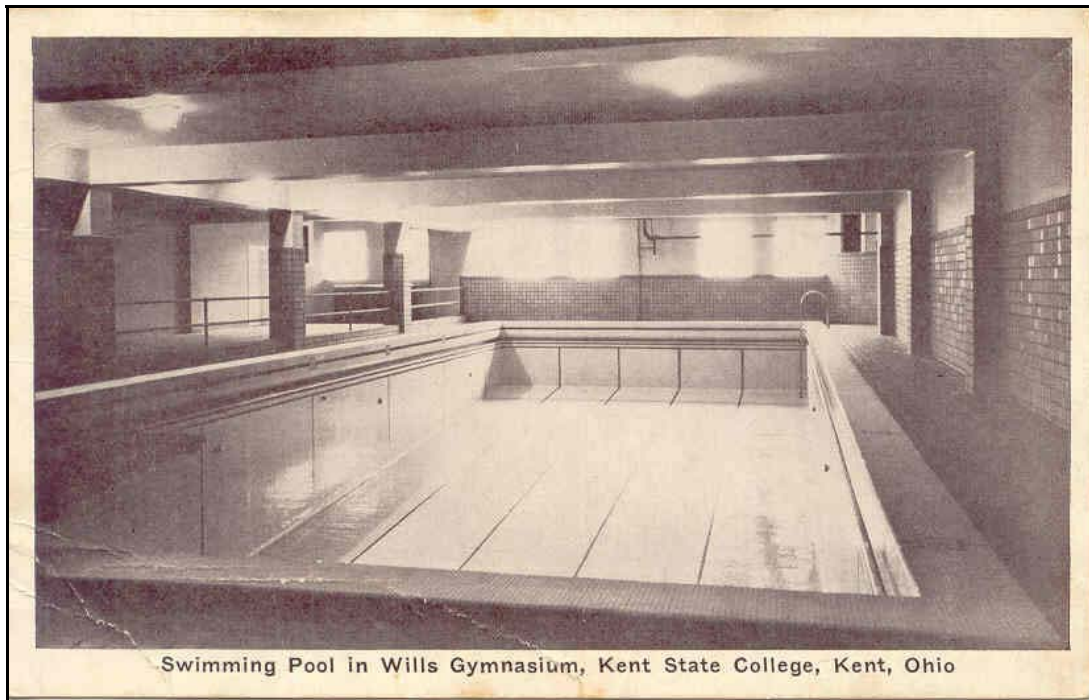


In keeping with that plan, on March 19, 1913, the Ohio House passed an appropriation bill authorizing construction of an auditorium, library, gymnasium and office building (now the Administration and Auditorium Building) along with an “agricultural and training-school” building (now Kent Hall) and a powerhouse. The Ohio Senate passed the enabling bill within a month and allocated \$100,000 for each academic building and \$20,000 for the powerhouse. The major portion of construction on the main buildings appears to have been done during 1914 and 1915 (a photo of 1914 summer enrollees clearly shows the administration building, but not Kent Hall, under construction). Delay in building Kent Hall came about because the contract for the auditorium/library/office building was awarded at a figure of \$94,987, but problems were encountered in excavating for its foundation. Accordingly, cost estimates for the adjacent classroom structure were increased and required the appropriation of additional funds by the legislature. Eventually,

on July 18, 1914, the Evans Co. got the contract for \$143,880, but the additional funds were granted only after the trustees agreed to postpone construction of the power plant. Somewhat strangely (in light of the very ceremonious cornerstone laying for Merrill Hall), there are no records of any formal dedication for either of the two new buildings. However, both structures were in use by the Fall 1915 term (quarter), although that occupancy was probably a bit too hasty. Without the central heating that might have come from the planned powerhouse, many books in the new library and a pipe-organ in the auditorium were extensively damaged during the cold and damp winter of 1915-16. Students and staff huddled around portable gas heaters in both buildings while the heating and power plant awaited completion. That came about only after another winter had passed and Moulton Hall was constructed. Although plans for at least three new buildings and expansions were pending before the legislature in 1916, World War I brought an end to all construction, and no more building occurred at Kent State until 1923. It was in that year that \$175,000 was appropriated to build Wills Gym as an attachment to the rear of the auditorium building. This structure partially covered a swamp (summer) and ice-skating pond (winter) that had been somewhat euphemistically named "Blackbird Lake" (see photo).



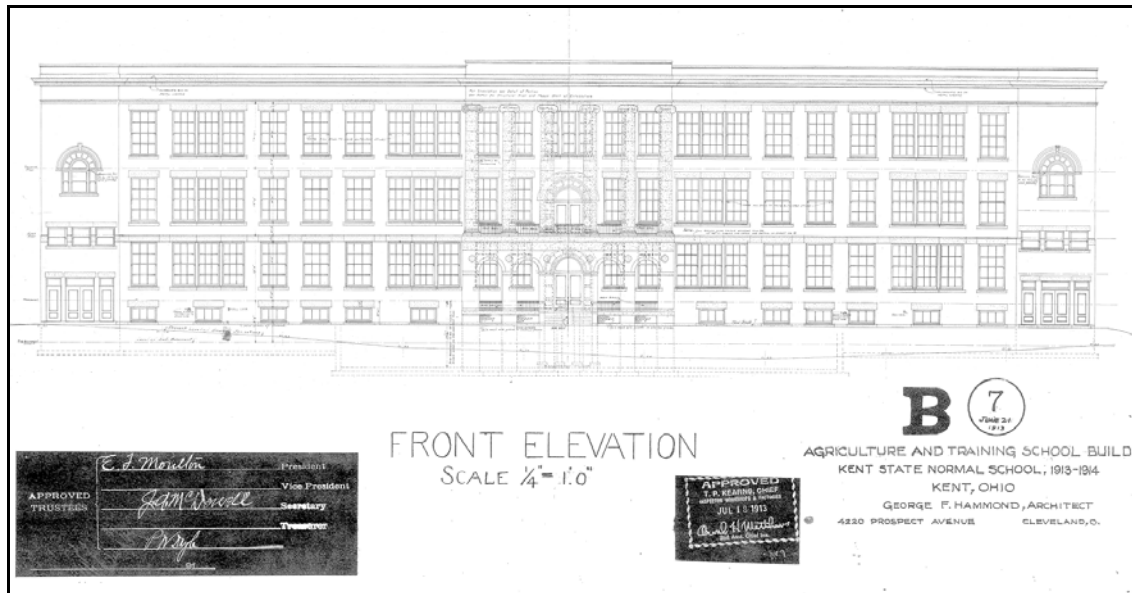
Presently, it comprises a portion of the R-15 parking lot that serves Kent Hall and the administration building (and did provide some tennis courts in the 1960s). The now demolished Wills Gym (partially replaced by the modern rear façade of the auditorium) included a swimming pool (see next page), locker rooms and court facilities on the floor above. In later years, perhaps plagued by its footing in a swamp, the building shifted a bit, the pool developed cracks and there was a hump in the basketball floor that Roy Lilly claimed to be a hindrance to his prowess (alternative explanations for that performance have been advanced).



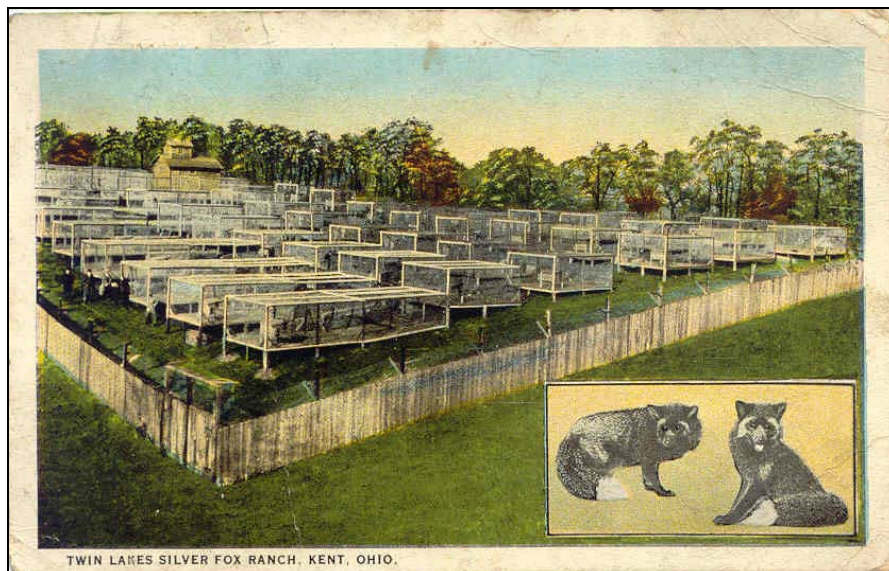
What's in a Name and What's in the Building?

Although legislatively established as a normal school that would award only elementary teaching certificates after two years of training, President McGilvery foresaw Kent as a major educational institution and developed a “50-year plan” to attain that goal. Despite being constantly at odds with Ohio State and its president, McGilvery advertised in Kent’s initial brochures (1912) that a 4-year degree for school administrators was intended, and by June 1915 he had the institution’s name changed from normal school to normal “college”. Working with local community leaders, he also tried to establish a liberal arts program, but was turned down by the legislature, seemingly by opposition from Ohio State. Nevertheless, in 1921 he publicly predicted that Kent would become a university that granted doctoral degrees.

Meanwhile, training programs in elementary education, agriculture and manual training, home economics and kindergarten teaching had to be conducted in the available facilities. Kent Hall was the site for some of these programs, but it wasn’t called Kent Hall at that time. Although initially designated as the “Agriculture and Training School Building” in architectural drawings (see next page), it was labeled the “Agriculture and Science Building” when actually under construction. On July 24, 1914, a newspaper release referred to the building as “Science Hall” and that name was destined to remain for 24 years.



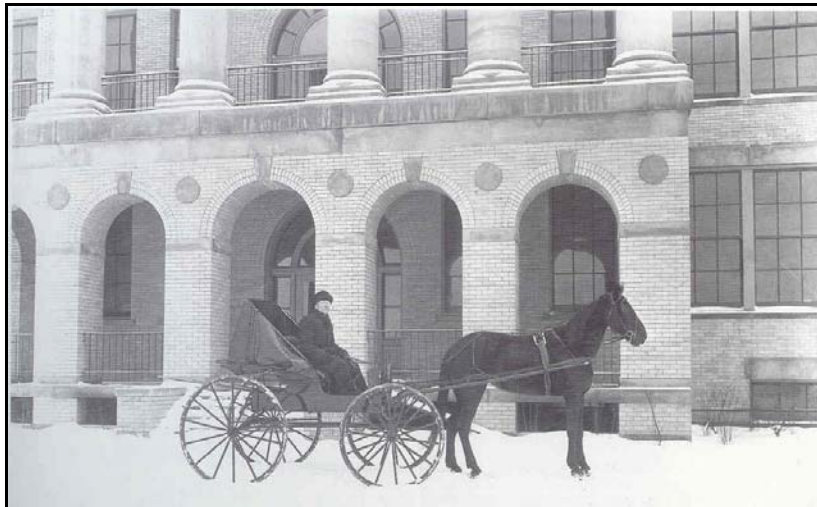
During that interim, Pres. McGilvery was fired (1926) but remained in the Kent area (farming and raising foxes for pelts – see postcard below) and his many contributions were later acknowledged by awarding him the title of “President Emeritus” (1934). Along with that designation, he was also hired as a director of alumni relations and given an on-campus office. In his alumni relations position, McGilvery campaigned vigorously to get the institution designated a “university” (achieved in 1935) and headed a fund drive that combined state support and federal depression recovery funds (in 1938) to construct a new building for the university’s science departments. In recognition of his role, the trustees unanimously voted to name the new chemistry, physics and biology building, McGilvery Hall. Of course, this also carried the implication that the sciences would not be in “Science Hall”, so on Dec. 3, 1938 that building was renamed “William S. Kent Hall” in honor of the original benefactor.



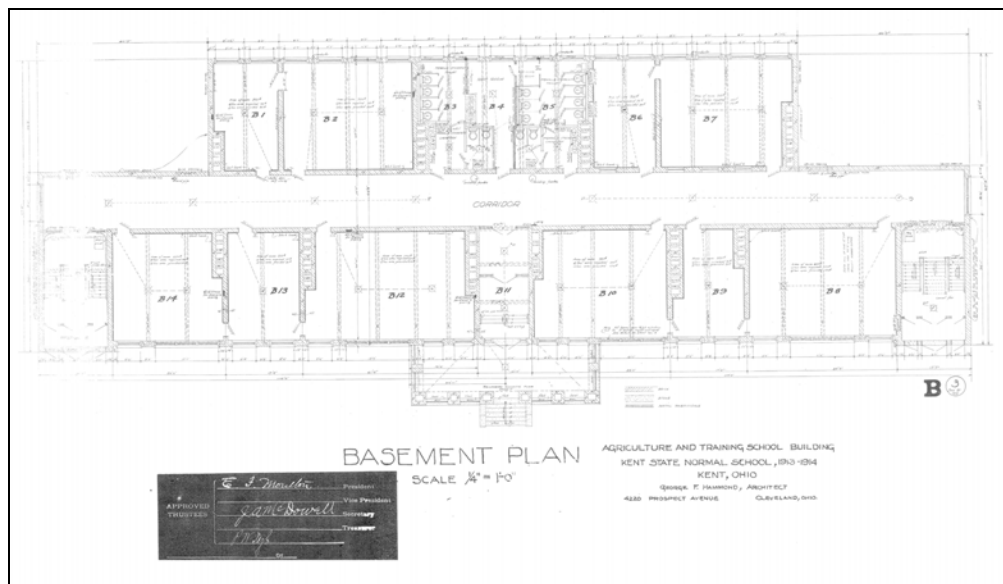
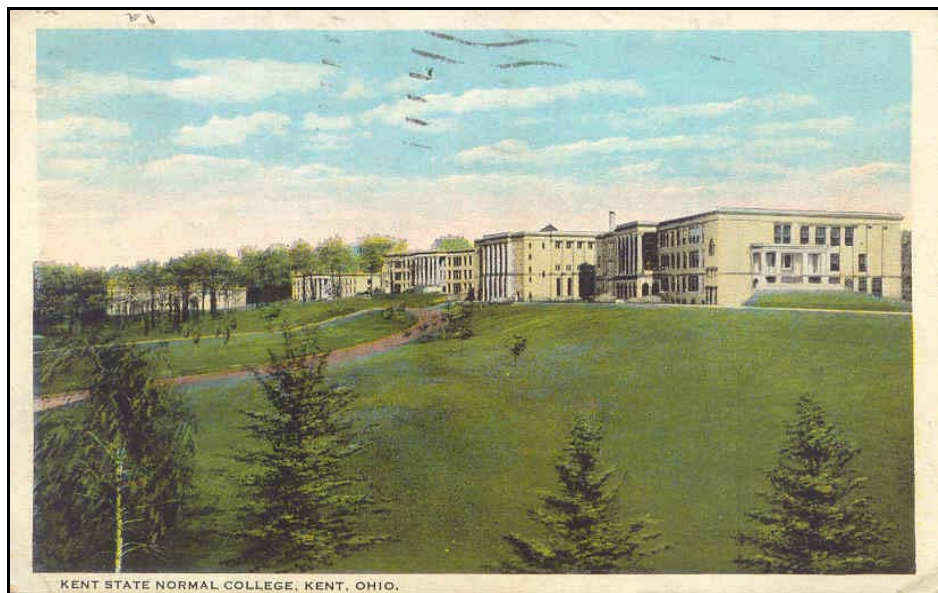
William S. Kent was a civic leader, the publisher of a local newspaper (The Courier), and in 1908 successor to his father as President of the Kent National Bank. He was an especially active member of the Kent Chamber of Commerce that helped the city to get a proposed normal school located in Kent rather than in one of many competing surrounding communities. Stories abound regarding locals currying favor with the state's visiting evaluators, but availability of land at the old Kent farm and its accessibility to rail service were probably influential features. With regard to naming, the city of Kent was named for Marvin Kent, Wm. S. Kent's father, because of the prosperity that came about (population doubled) when he got the shops of the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad located here. Kent State is unique among Ohio's state-supported schools in being named for an individual. Of course, Kent Hall is also named for William S., and although he knew about naming the institution, he died well before (1923) the building got its current designation.

The present Kent Hall has served many departments and institutional functions over the years, and not all of these have been recorded. However, a few of the original occupants are known. True to its original description as a site for agricultural subjects, the building housed the operations of John T. Johnson who also served as dean of the faculty. Johnson was a former colleague of President McGilvery in their previous posts at Western Illinois Normal (Maccomb), and had served as head of biology and agriculture at that institution. He was one of Kent's first five employees and is of interest to psychologists because he complained when McGilvery assigned him to a Ravenna extension psychology course conducted before any buildings were completed. He later recalled that when he claimed he was an agriculture specialist, the president's response was – "You go over and teach that class".

In addition to the initial funds for constructing Merrill and Lowry Hall, the legislature did include a two-year \$180,000 appropriation for maintenance and staffing. That sum allowed the original faculty of 5 (in 1912) to grow to about 20 by Fall 1913. Among these was Clinton S. Van Deusen, formerly assistant professor of manual arts at Bradley Tech (IL). He conducted a four-year manual training degree program (see photo in carriage) that was housed in Science Hall until 1925 when it moved to the second floor of the heating plant (and that building was renamed the Manual Arts Building). Van Deusen chaired this program until his retirement in 1943, and its continued growth required a separate structure that was initially called the Industrial and Applied Arts Building. In 1956, the name of that building was changed to Van Deusen Hall in his honor.



The original 1913 architectural drawings for the structure that was to become Kent Hall included only classrooms, hallways and restroom facilities with no indication of specific use. A notable property of those plans is that the building's top floor was designated as the second floor, although the actual building reveals the same three-story aspect that exists today. Seemingly, this was a ploy to circumvent a then-existing state law that limited school buildings to two stories as a caution in case of fire. The architects, as they had done with the two earlier buildings, simply labeled the first floor as a "basement", and, as seen in a postcard from the 1920s (see below), mounded an earth bank to the level of the balcony. However, the original plans did get some modification early in construction. Apparently as a result of the increased appropriation awarded in 1914, wings that extend to the rear at each end of the structure were added. Note their absence in the original floor plans (below), although they are obvious in photos taken during construction (p. 8).





Kent's progression from normal school to university was neither smooth nor rapid. As one step, McGilvery, while a private citizen, rallied community support for Kent State (and BG) to follow his earlier stated plan and provide liberal arts courses. Although the legislature approved such offerings in 1929, Kent's administration, concerned about teacher training, offered only one course (Latin) that year and three the next (all by faculty who also taught psychology). It should be noted that there was really no separate psychology department during those years; courses were listed under "Education and Psychology" with all psychology listings offered by just two individuals who had been hired in 1925 and 1926. Although a building for the "training school" (for teachers) was completed in 1926 (the William A. Cluff Building - later renamed Franklin Hall), the Department of Education and Psychology never moved there and remained in Science

Hall. In 1937, the department added one female faculty member, and she along with the two noted previously comprised Kent's entire psychology staff until 1947. However, in 1938, Karl Leebrick became president, and as a part of his initiative to advance liberal arts (vis-à-vis education), he designated psychology a separate department in the social studies division of the Liberal Arts College (Fall 1939). A variety of programs were housed in Science Hall, but with the sciences relocating to the newly constructed McGilvery Hall, psychology was destined to be ever after in the renamed "William S. Kent Hall".

A Home to Many

It has been recorded that, at one time or another, the building provided an exercise facility before the construction of Wills Gym, a practice high school and grade school (later to be University School), the offices of the student newspaper, the university bookstore, a radio workshop and a little theater complete with box office. Many departments and administrative offices shared the Kent Hall space. Sociology, philosophy and home economics had offices on the top floor during one period. Instructional Film Service (the Audio-Visual center), foreign languages, and speech were housed on the second floor at various times. Administrators seemed to especially prize the ground floor locations. In the post-WWII era, the Office of Veterans Affairs and Student Financial Aids were located there, as were the offices of the (now-archaic positions of) Dean of Women and Dean of Men. That corridor also housed administrative offices for student services and counselor education.

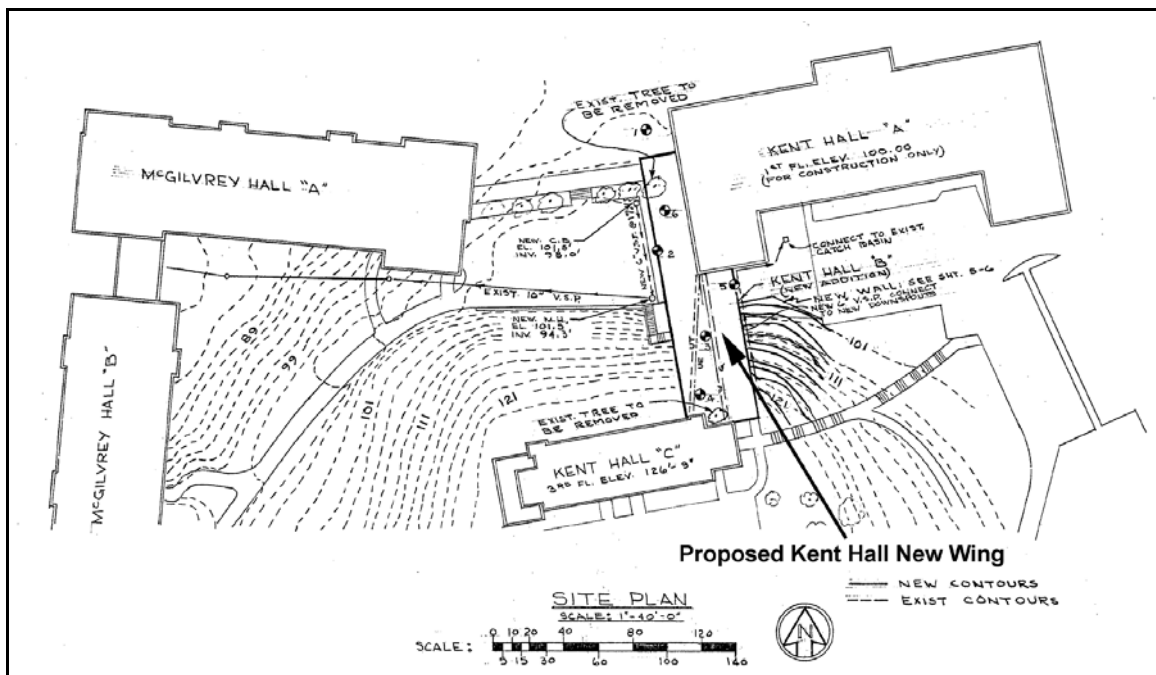
However, a number of events combined to move Kent Hall toward its eventual position as "the" psychology building. With WWII's emphasis on psychological testing and the many post WWII vets who enrolled under the GI Bill, Kent's department needed to meet the growing demand for training in the discipline. To accomplish that, the administration made several 1947 hires that included a new, but experienced, chair (R.M. Drake), a clinic director (C.N. Winslow) and a vigorous, young animal investigator (C.C. Perkins). During the late 1940s and 1950s the department continued to grow and turn out large numbers of MA graduates (109 between 1949 and 59), many of whom went on to achieve PhDs elsewhere and become noted members of the profession. The students of Perkins did especially well, and his innovative utilization of animal test space in the depths of Kent Hall's actual basement (after banishment from biology space in McGilvery Hall) gained recognition for both he and many of his advisees.

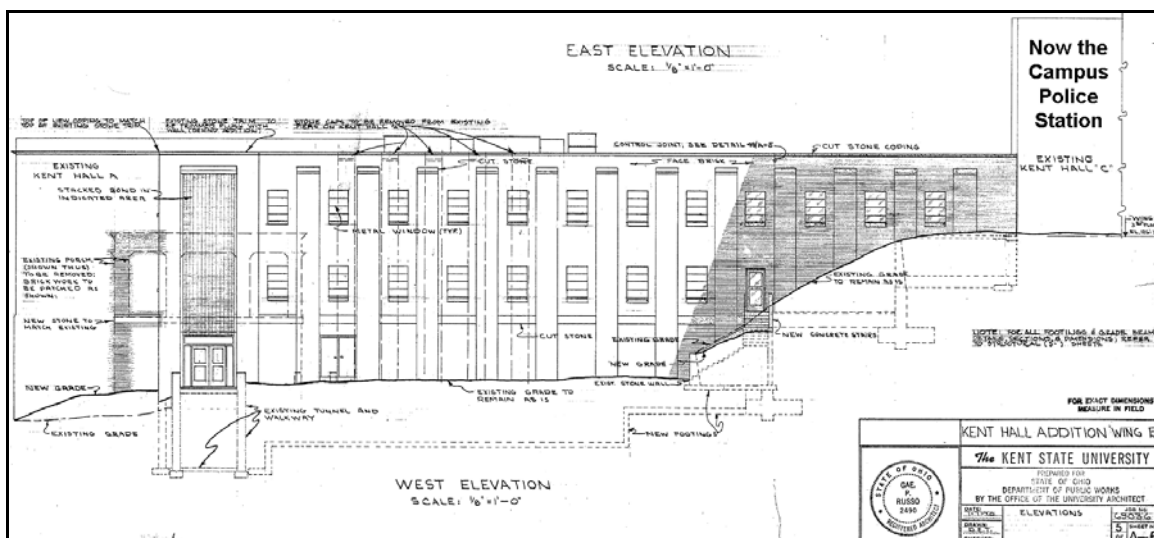
So great was the post-war growth and development of Kent State, that by 1959, the administration initiated plans to fulfill McGilvery's dream of awarding the PhD. Although psychology was not selected as one of the first departments to offer the degree, steps to achieve that goal were instituted. A new chair from a doctoral-granting program (Joe Grosslight of Penn State) was recruited to provide appropriate personnel and facility planning. Modifications of Kent Hall were a part of that transition, and it was Grosslight's decision that Kent Hall should become the psychology building. However, that transition was necessarily a gradual one, but one aided by some parallel construction projects. The Speech and Music Building was completed in 1960 and Bowman Hall opened in early 1962 so that much shuffling of academic departments, especially the humanities, occurred. Home economics, sociology and some language departments were among the later units to vacate the upper floors of Kent Hall.

With the advent of the doctoral program and an emphasis on research at both graduate and undergraduate levels, Grosslight requested renovations and additions to Kent Hall. Research cubicles were built to aid offerings of laboratory courses. Sound-

isolated and anechoic rooms were installed on the second floor, and an attempt was made to expand and improve the basement animal facility. That up-grade may also have hastened the departure of some administrative operations from the first floor. An exhaust fan from the animal facility was installed so close to the air-conditioner for the Dean of Women's office that complaint about the smell was forwarded to the Buildings and Grounds department. Perhaps the most extensive modification was made in the summer of 1962 and involved placing a primate colony on the building's third floor in space that had previously housed sociology offices. This prompted the comment, "twelve monkeys for three full profs in sociology – a straight player deal". Although requiring extensive plumbing and ventilating, this facility supported monkey research operations until late 1971.

During the mid-1960s, nearly all experimental faculty collaborated on an NSF Departmental Science Development Grant that was awarded in early 1970. The \$400,000 grant was designated for research equipment and required a matching contribution from the institution. A portion of that match was to be provided via additional research space and new animal housing. Along with some renovations to internal rooms, an architectural plan for an addition to Kent Hall was drawn. This structure was intended to bridge between the west end of the building and the east end of the former DeWeese Health Center (now the campus police station – see plans below). However, the university architect vetoed this plan in favor of a less expensive alternative provided by tucking the wing behind the first and second floors of the old structure. By late 1971, the existing animal wing was completed, and the rats came out of the basement and the monkeys came down from the third floor. Despite some problems requiring renovations to meet federal animal care standards, this facility has supported nearly all departmental animal research needs for over 30 years.





One administrative response to Kent's May 4, 1970 tragedy and its associated reduction in enrollment was to curtail departmental operating monies. This negatively impacted many of the innovations that were gained under terms of the then-recent NSF Development Grant. Among these were the loss of a departmental library (1979) and a research equipment fabrication shop (1982). Despite these setbacks, the late 1970s and early 80s brought a succession of Kent Hall internal renovations to provide more air-conditioning, offices and research space for a growing faculty. As more and more new buildings were completed (Satterfield, the Business Building and, eventually, the Science complex), other administrative offices disappeared from Kent Hall. True to Joe Grosslight's mandate, Kent Hall did become the psychology building. However, from 1974 to 1981 the psychological clinic provided space to Portage County Children's Services, and a small office was temporarily made available to Staff Benefits in the mid-1980s. The Affirmative Action Office was the last non-departmental administrative function to be located in Kent Hall, and it departed in the late 1980s. With the 1986 award of an Ohio Board of Regents Academic Challenge Award and the 1987 hire of a full-time director, the Applied Psychology Center came into being. This operation was located in extensively renovated space on the first floor of Kent Hall and was the last major building change prior to our most recently completed construction and renovation.

From its beginnings as the fourth structure to appear on the Kent State campus, this building has served a wide range of occupants. Because psychology was among the first courses to be offered at the institution, it seems reasonable that the department should be housed in Kent Hall. Along with its neighboring structures on the front campus, it has achieved the honored status of being listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. Although there were times when it may not have provided all the comfort and function one might have wished, let us hope that the newly renovated building may serve future psychologists and adapt itself to the needs of the profession for another 90 years.

Phillip Schriver's "The Years of Youth: Kent State University, 1910-1960" (KSU Press, 1960) is acknowledged for much of the early institutional information. Some photos are courtesy of KSU Library Special Collections & Archives, and blueprints were graciously provided by KSU's Office of the University Architect. Photo editing by J. Updegraff.