



Winter 2005

[HOME](#)
[Features](#)
[Web Exclusives](#)
[Letters & Columns](#)
[News & Notes](#)
[Academics](#)
[Sports](#)
[Fund Raising](#)
[Alumni Profiles](#)
[Events](#)
[Class Notes](#)
[Archives](#)
[Write to the Editor](#)
[Submit Class Notes](#)
[Change Address](#)
[Subscribe](#)

features

Building Boom
Caroline Purtell

As Xavier University approaches the 175th anniversary of its founding in 2006, Xavier magazine is examining key moments in the University's history. This is part of a series of stories about the people, places and events that have made Xavier what it is today. You can read previous stories by clicking on the links below.



The warm summer months of 1920 marked a new era for Xavier University. Working monuments—symbolic of a decade characterized by its optimism and prosperity—began appearing on the naked hilltops of North Avondale. While the nation's urban centers flourished and a jazz crusade raged, Cincinnati's construction companies profited from Jesuit dollars. For the next 10 years, these companies were charged with the task of transforming a 26-acre suburban refuge into the keystone of Catholic education for the Archdiocese.

Even as far back as 1911, however, the Jesuits had recognized the need to expand their campus from Seventh and Sycamore streets in downtown Cincinnati to more spacious surroundings. Factory noise, dirt, smoke and a restricting metropolitan landscape prompted Archbishop Henry Moeller to approve the purchase of the Bragg Estate—a plot anchoring Victory Parkway, between Winding Way and Dana and Herald avenues—from the Avondale Athletic Club in 1911. The three-story, red-brick, Georgian-style clubhouse, which sat on the site of the present Joseph Building, served as the first school building. The Jesuits divided the ballroom into classrooms and converted part of the banquet hall into the chapel, but, to the student's delight, left the bowling alley intact.

On Dec. 28, 1911, Archbishop Moeller dedicated and blessed the renovated building, renamed Xavier Hall, and later remarked in a letter to University President Francis Heiermann, S.J., "Hence we congratulate your Society and feel deeply grateful that it has secured the beautiful and suitable site in Avondale, in order to extend the sphere of its educational activity. We fondly cherish the hope that, ere long, the site will be adorned not only by a large and flourishing college, but also graced by a Catholic University."

While the building was the official start of the expansion to the suburbs, the downtown campus remained Xavier's hub for another eight years, with the former clubhouse being occupied by high school students from the branch academy. In 1919, though, alumni and Jesuits were anxious to move the rest of the college to the Avondale site.

To show their support, the alumni launched a fund-raising campaign, attempting to raise \$75,000 and put together a brochure that included the proposed building plans. Writing in *Continuity and Change, Xavier University 1831-1981*, Lee J. Bennish, S.J., recounts the ambitious initial drawings: "In the first series, the east side of the campus between Northside Avenue (now Victory Parkway) and Herald Avenue (now the campus mall) would have a modest faculty building, student dormitory and classroom building, and the west campus between Victory Parkway and Dana-Winding Way would include the Club House, a gymnasium and outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, basketball courts, handball courts, two football and a baseball fields, and an oval running track."

Later plans called for a large chapel, a research laboratory for graduate students, an arboretum and an open-air theater.

Large-scale construction did not begin, however, until April 1919, when the University received its largest gift to date: \$100,000 from Mrs. Frederick W. Hinkle, patroness of Hinkle Hall. The three-story Tudor-Gothic structure, modeled after the Xavier family castle in Navarre, Spain, housed administrative offices as well as living quarters for Jesuit faculty, a dining room, chapel, recreation room, roof garden and library.

With an additional \$50,000 gift from the alumni to build Alumni Science Hall (now Edgecliff Hall), construction began on June 24, 1919. A little over a year later, the College of Arts and Sciences moved to Avondale, and the Jesuits followed a few months later, enjoying their first meal on campus on Thanksgiving Day 1920.

Once the Jesuits established residency, momentum—and enthusiasm—increased. Subsequent years brought about the additions of Elet Hall, the first dormitory, named after the school's first president, John A. Elet, S.J.; the library building (Schmidt Hall), which was a gift from 1905 graduate Walter Schmidt and temporarily housed a fledgling Bellarmine Chapel; the Fieldhouse; and the football stadium. The decade closed with the construction of the Biology Building, made possible by William H. Albers, who requested anonymity at the time.

The college had finally established its roots in the suburban community and no further construction took place until after World War II.

Once a small suburban refuge, Avondale has since grown into a center of commercial and residential activity, and the college's 26-acre foundation has matured into a 140-acre university.

While many in the early 20th century could not have fathomed the outcome, it's clear that others had always maintained this vision. At the 25th anniversary reception for the alumni association in 1913, William T. Burns, the association's historian, foreshadowed the school's progress: "Would it be too much to hope that in the not-too-distant future some alumnus, to take part in a celebration something akin to this one, might take his stand upon one of the nearby hills and gaze with brightening eye and throbbing heart upon the different lecture halls

and colleges that dot the spacious acres of St. Xavier University?”

Find out more about the University's humble beginnings and test your knowledge of Xavier's building progress with this [quiz](#).

Other stories in the 175th anniversary series:

[Forming the Foundation](#)

[Early Times](#)

[War & Remembrance](#)

[Legends of the Fall](#)

[Previous](#)

site maintained by Xavier University
design | [innersync studio](#)