Burning of the University of Alabama

Landon C. Garland, professor English and history at the University of Alabama, was elected as the University’s third president in 1855. Garland, who previously held the same post at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, worked diligently his first few years to increase the level of discipline on campus. Student discipline at the time was seen as an issue, not only on campus, but in the nearby town of Tuscaloosa where many local citizens saw the students as “drunkards, gamblers, and ruffians.” In an attempt to solve this problem, Garland lobbied to have the University converted to a military academy, a change the University’s Board of Trustees adopted in July 1860. The conversion to military discipline had immediate and positive effects on the atmosphere of the campus. Alongside the usual academic curriculum, students took courses in military tactics, wore uniforms, and performed regular drills. Garland, still the University’s president became the superintendent of what was known as the “Alabama Corps of Cadets.” New structures were built on campus to support its new military functions, including temporary barracks and the “Guard House,” constructed about 1859 as a shelter for students as they stood watch at night.
One year after the University converted to a military academy, growing tensions between northern and southern states led to the 1861 outbreak of the Civil War. As early as 1863, Union Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant designated the University of Alabama campus as a military target because the school had produced a large number of high-ranking Confederate officers. In the spring of 1865, Major General James Harrison Wilson marched 13,500 Union soldiers into Confederate territory with the goal of wiping out any vestiges of resistance. During their march through Alabama, Union soldiers destroyed miles of railroad tracks, put 16 of 17 blast furnaces out of production, and destroyed several factories and arsenals. By late March 1865, Wilson’s forces reached the town of Elyton, now known as the city of Birmingham. At this time, General John T. Croxton of Kentucky marched a faction of 800 soldiers towards Tuscaloosa, with the intent of destroying the University of Alabama.
In the end, Garland’s 300 student cadets were no match for the invading Union battalion and were forced to retreat, leaving both the University and the city of Tuscaloosa unprotected. In the early morning hours of April 4, 1864, Croxton succeeded in his mission as Union troops set fire to the University. By that afternoon, only a few buildings remained standing on campus. These buildings included the Pratt House (Gorgas House), the observatory (Maxwell Hall), the President’s Mansion, three faculty houses, and the Guard House (Little Round House).

Among the casualties were two faculty houses, all four dormitories (including Jefferson Hall), the temporary barracks, the Rotunda, and the Lyceum. The University of Alabama, left with no dormitories or classroom, was forced to close. The construction of new buildings on campus began shortly after, but classes did not officially resume until the term of 1871-1872. Just four days after the burning of the campus, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant marking the end of the Civil War.
JEFFERSON HALL

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**What was Jefferson Hall?**

Jefferson Hall was one of two original dormitories on the 1831 University of Alabama campus. Each of the dormitories was able to accommodate 48, male students. The housing was divided into 12 apartments, that included a sitting room with fireplace and two bedrooms (double occupancy).

In 2007, a road improvement project was completed in front of Smith Hall (former site of the Jefferson Hall dormitory). During the excavations, artifacts were recovered from the dormitory structure, as well as personal effects from the male students that had lived there.

Most of the artifacts show evidence of the dormitory’s burning in April, 1865. However, their extraordinary recovery, after being buried for over 140 years, provides tangible evidence of life as a 19th century University of Alabama student.
University of Alabama campus on April 3, 1865.

Sketch by: Dr. Robert Mellown, Professor of Art and Art History, University of Alabama. Found in The University of Alabama: A Pictorial History by Suzanne Rau Wolfe.
Images show a residential street in Colon, Panama, before and after Colonel Gorgas’s sanitation plan was implemented. Prior to paving, there were open sewers, in ditches, in front of the homes.

Images: U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History

University of Alabama campus on April 4, 1865.

Sketch by: Dr. Robert Mellown, Professor of Art and Art History, University of Alabama. Found in The University of Alabama: A Pictorial History by Suzanne Rau Wolfe.
Image of a model of Jefferson Hall.

Image provided courtesy of the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, the University of Alabama.
Sketch of Jefferson Hall, 1866, by UA Professor, Eugene Allen Smith.

Image provided courtesy of the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, the University of Alabama.
Brick
Handmade; plaster and paint still visible

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.43
Floor Nails
Inset: plaster with embedded nail

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.14
Window Glass

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.14
Brass Tack

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.28

Straight Pins

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.16
Tea Cup and Saucer

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.5-6
Brass Buttons
Gilt stamped with floral motif

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.16
**Brass Button**

Floral motif

*The University of Alabama Museums*

2007.125.8

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**Brass Button**

“T” signifies Confederate Infantry

*The University of Alabama Museums*

2007.125.8
Brass Button
Features South Carolina state motto

“Animis opibusque parati”

“The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.8

“Prepared in mind and resources”
Marble
Brown and white clay

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2007.125.16
Pipe Fragment
Pipe bowl was in the shape of a human face

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.2
Suspender buckle
Scroll motif; marked “G B”

The University of Alabama Museums
2007.125.16
Toothbrush Fragment

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