

## **LMU and the “Wave of the Future” Justin Velez and Brendan McNerney**

*“We ask two things of our buildings:  
that they shelter us and that they speak to us.”  
- John Ruskin (Architectural Critic), from an Interview with  
former President Lawton, S.J.*

Measured against Architectural Critic John Ruskin’s standard, the buildings of Loyola Marymount University have been an overwhelming success. The sheltering process began immediately after Loyola University arrived at its Westchester location in 1929. Under the direction of President Joseph A. Sullivan, S.J., two buildings were completed: Saint Robert’s Hall and Xavier Hall. While St. Robert’s was used for classrooms and administration offices, according to Henry Bodkin, who attended Loyola from 1939 to 1943, Xavier was nicknamed “the Big House,” providing shelter for the Jesuit faculty and students. Over the next eight decades, as the University slowly expanded, a dialogue of sorts developed between the buildings that were completed and those whom they most impacted, the students, faculty, and staff of LMU. However, at critical moments, it was Howard Hughes, the brilliant, yet troubled entrepreneur, who entered into the discussion. As a result, the history of the physical changes at LMU has been oftentimes inspiring, sometimes contentious, yet always fascinating.

1929 proved a tough year to start building a University. For the next several decades, much of the 100 acres of donated land from Harry Culver remained undeveloped. The Depression of the 1930’s, according to Henry Bodkin, “came along and they couldn’t raise any money to build anything more.” Describing the campus of the late 1930s, Bodkin stated, “when I went to school here, they had those two buildings and the little shack that had been the building for the contractors that built those two buildings. And shortly before I arrived in September of 1939, they paved Loyola Boulevard from 80<sup>th</sup> Street into the campus. And that was that. That’s all there was.” Bodkin also remembered that World War II presented unique challenges to the University. Enrollments plummeted as students left for the war. “I think by the time I left, the number had decreased very substantially. I have no idea what the number was. But people were going off. And it was a different ballgame.” Bodkin remembers hearing about his classmates: “guys were getting killed and we would hear about it, guys in my class, people that I knew well were getting knocked off.”

The sudden halt in the school’s expansion during the Depression and World War II eras would be reversed in the post-war years when admissions increased rapidly, thanks in part to the passage of the G.I. Bill, which helped finance college educations for veterans. This prompted the school to build two new housing facilities: Huesman Hall and Sullivan Hall. But building could not keep pace with demands, so the University purchased Quonset huts from the federal government. These huts, which were used for classrooms, spoke volumes to the students on campus in the early 1950s. Fred Lower remembered that the huts were quick to build, cheap, and “miserably cold in the winter and awfully hot any other time of the year.” Lower continued, “One of the things that people from my era talk about is we studied in them in college and lived in them when we were in the service.” In short, the Quonset huts made the school look and feel like a military base.

According to Lower, the school had the sounds of a military base as well. In the 1940s, Howard Hughes had purchased over 900 acres in Playa Vista, adjacent to, and northeast of the

## **LMU and the “Wave of the Future”**

### **Justin Velez and Brendan McNerney**

University, to develop Hughes Aircraft Company. Lower explained that during the 1950s, Hughes would often test helicopters and airplanes near the school. Describing what it was like to take a class on the north side of St. Robert’s, Lower remembered that “because there was no air conditioning the windows were always open. A helicopter would get up just about as high as the bluff and then fly back and forth, back and forth. The professor would try to talk over all of this noise.” In addition to testing aircraft, Hughes also had a firing range on the bluff to test the development of rapid fire cannon. It was not uncommon, Lower stated, to be talking and “all of a sudden there would be this high-pitched burst of fire.”

Hughes’ seemingly purposeful intrusions may have been meant to avenge a recent rebuff from the University. From 1953-1954, under President Casassa, Loyola’s construction focused on building Sacred Heart Chapel and the bell tower. But the proposed 125-foot high tower angered Hughes, who believed it would interfere with his airfield below. It is rumored that Hughes also feared the Jesuits planned to spy on him from the tower. Hughes told Father Casassa that he did not want the tower built so close to the bluff. But despite Hughes’ best efforts, the bell tower was eventually erected in 1954. It, along with Sacred Heart Chapel, form the central landmarks of what is today considered upper campus. Both serve their function in this narrative: Sacred Heart Chapel provides spiritual shelter while the Bell Tower speaks in a concrete way each day as it tolls out the time.

In the aftermath of the conflict with Hughes, the University would expand at an accelerated pace during the late 1950s and 1960s, including the building of Von Der Ahe Library. But by the late 1960s, the merger would take center stage in the dialogue between buildings and the surrounding community. The original plan for the joining of Loyola University and Marymount College was for the two campuses to reside on adjacent property yet remain independent from one another. It was Howard Hughes who would change this plan. A mere four years before his death, Hughes was approached by the administrations of both Loyola and Marymount about purchasing a plot of land known today as the Leavey campus. This would be where the newly added Marymount students would live, allowing both colleges to remain separate entities. Hughes, perhaps recalling earlier scuffles with the university, was adamantly opposed to the idea. This time, the power was in his hands and his refusal to sell, even on his death bed, inadvertently led to the official merging of Loyola and Marymount into one co-ed institution: Loyola Marymount University.

Although Hughes died a few years later in 1976, his contributions to LMU weren’t complete: decades later, after years of independent development of the campus, his final addition would be made. But in the interim, dramatic changes began to take place visually on the campus. Dr. Michael Genovese, Chair of the Political Science Department, described the change: “...there wasn’t a flower on campus. And when Father Loughran came in . . . [h]e started bringing in landscapers and really making the campus attractive.” Describing the impact of these physical changes, Genovese continues, “...we bring in the best scholars from Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Chicago. They come here and they are so unbelievably impressed. They’re impressed with the physical layout as well they should be. It’s a gorgeous campus.”

But the most monumental change to the campus would come in 2000 when under the presidency of Father Lawton, the school acquired University Hall. The irony is rich: University Hall was originally built as the world headquarters for Hughes Aircraft. Later, Raytheon bought

## **LMU and the “Wave of the Future”**

### **Justin Velez and Brendan McNerney**

Hughes Aircraft and sold the building to the University. The large-scale purchase, with its one million square feet, dramatically transformed the opportunities and facilities available to students and faculty alike by providing much needed office and classroom space. The new facility added 1,000 new parking spaces and 70,000 square feet of atrium space to host events. Father Lawton addressed the transformative impact that U-hall has had on the school: “...University Hall shelters a lot; I mean it gave a whole home for the Bellarmine College and also for the School of Ed. So it provided shelter. But to me the big thing was it really spoke to the university. [If] you take a look at the university before University Hall and after University Hall, the university - - much, much larger in terms of its ambitions, its goals, how it saw itself, and I think partly that’s due to this building.” University Hall’s contribution was thus more than practical. It helped change the mentality of the school. As Father Lawton states: “...this building said ‘be ambitious, think big about your possibilities as a university.’ So I think the building spoke to us in addition to sheltering us, if you will.”

In 2010, the addition of Hannon Library, which prominently overlooks Playa Vista, helped link the lower and upper campuses. Father Lawton described how the library united the school. “In many ways it was two campuses before the library, and the library brought us together. And you just say ‘what better thing at a university to have a library be what unites the campus’.” Despite all the changes to the campus, cohesiveness persists. As alumnus Kristi Gonsalves-McCabe succinctly noted: “it certainly has changed a lot in terms of the physical appearance but I don’t think the heart of the place has changed.”

By the end of 2011, LMU will have celebrated its 100th anniversary, full of a million big and little physical changes acquired over its long and tumultuous history, many instigated by Howard Hughes himself. But amidst all of these changes it is clear that the buildings of Loyola Marymount University have satisfied the standard put forth by John Ruskin; for they have both spoken and sheltered throughout the years past, and will continue to do so for many more to come.