



Contributed by
Jim Douglas

Time has made a change in me: Nichols yearbooks

The college yearbook, from the early 1800s onward, grew out of students' desire to capture a time in their life, their school and community. At Nichols, the first yearbook was published in the spring of 1932 at the end of the first year of Nichols Junior College for Business Administration and Executive Training. Dedicated to its founder and president, James Lawson Conrad, it was titled *The Tower* in reference to the distinctive bell tower that stood atop Academy Hall.

The first *Tower* included faculty and student portraits, a graduating class photo, a history, superlatives, a last will, a directory, and group sports team and organization member photos. It also featured a few student-created cartoons and line art. The back end of the book contained ads, mostly from local businesses, and sponsors, which helped finance the publication. In terms of content, subsequent yearbooks pretty much followed this template throughout the twentieth century.

Most of the yearbooks in the '30s and '40s were text-heavy with page-long team and organization histories and, in some cases, paragraph-long senior bios. The yearbook was last published as *The Tower* in 1934 and, following a hiatus in 1935, returned as *The Ledger* in 1936. With the college closed between 1943 and 1946 during

WWII there were no yearbooks and, in 1947, a special *War Ledger* was published for alumni, featuring photos and a "man-by-man account of Nichols' sons at war" for each former student, starting with the Class of '32.

For historians, yearbooks can offer a useful window into the past. Take the 1955 *Ledger* and its "Vital Statistics" section that, among other things, described what the typical Nichols student wore to class (sport clothes with cordovans, foreign hand slim ties, over button down white shirt), smoked (Chesterfields or Lucky Strikes), and enjoyed for leisure and recreation (everything from "art appreciation to uke playing," but especially sports, photography, and sailing, and listening to pop and jazz). After marriage, he would prefer to live in a small town and "plans to be head of the household, with three or four children, where the wife stays home." Ah yes, the '50s.

Throughout the sixties, perhaps influenced by the popularity of pictorial magazines like *Look* and *Life*, the *Ledger* favored far less text and far more photos. By the eighties, some yearbooks had practically no text, just page after page of unidentified photos. Large candid photos dominated, sometimes taking up a third to an entire page.

(This trend was reversed in the seventies, as editors often used full-page collages with dozens of candid.)

The concept of the senior portrait has remained fairly steady over time, with junior portraits occasionally making an appearance, such as the early yearbooks and those in the mid to late '50s. In other cases, underclassmen were photographed in groups. Starting in 1960, students were grouped by residence hall, reflecting the growth and importance of student housing on campus. (To this day, many alumni identify themselves by class year and residence hall.) From 1997 to 2000 individual black and white photos of every underclassman in casual dress were provided. Business attire was de rigueur for senior portraits except from 1975 to 1977, where seniors are shown casually dressed in informal settings.

Color made its biggest splash in 1974 with a 16-page center titled "color potpourri," boasting eye-catching full-color pictures of student life. Color photos were inserted more frequently in subsequent yearbooks; full-color senior portraits were introduced in 1982. Yearbooks between 1998 and 2007, which were published by Jostens, contained their trademarked "World Beat" magazine, featuring color photos and commentary on the year's events. (Interestingly, Trustee Dave Lombard '65 worked on the *Ledger* during his four years here and was editor for two. He joined Jostens in 1972 and worked with them until his retirement in 2002.)

The staid black or dark green traditional yearbook covers of the '30s, '40s, and '50s were enhanced in later years with different color options, artwork, and techniques, such as embossing (engraving) or "stamping" a design on the cover's surface. Often, a foil was used to give the cover a silver or gold metallic look.

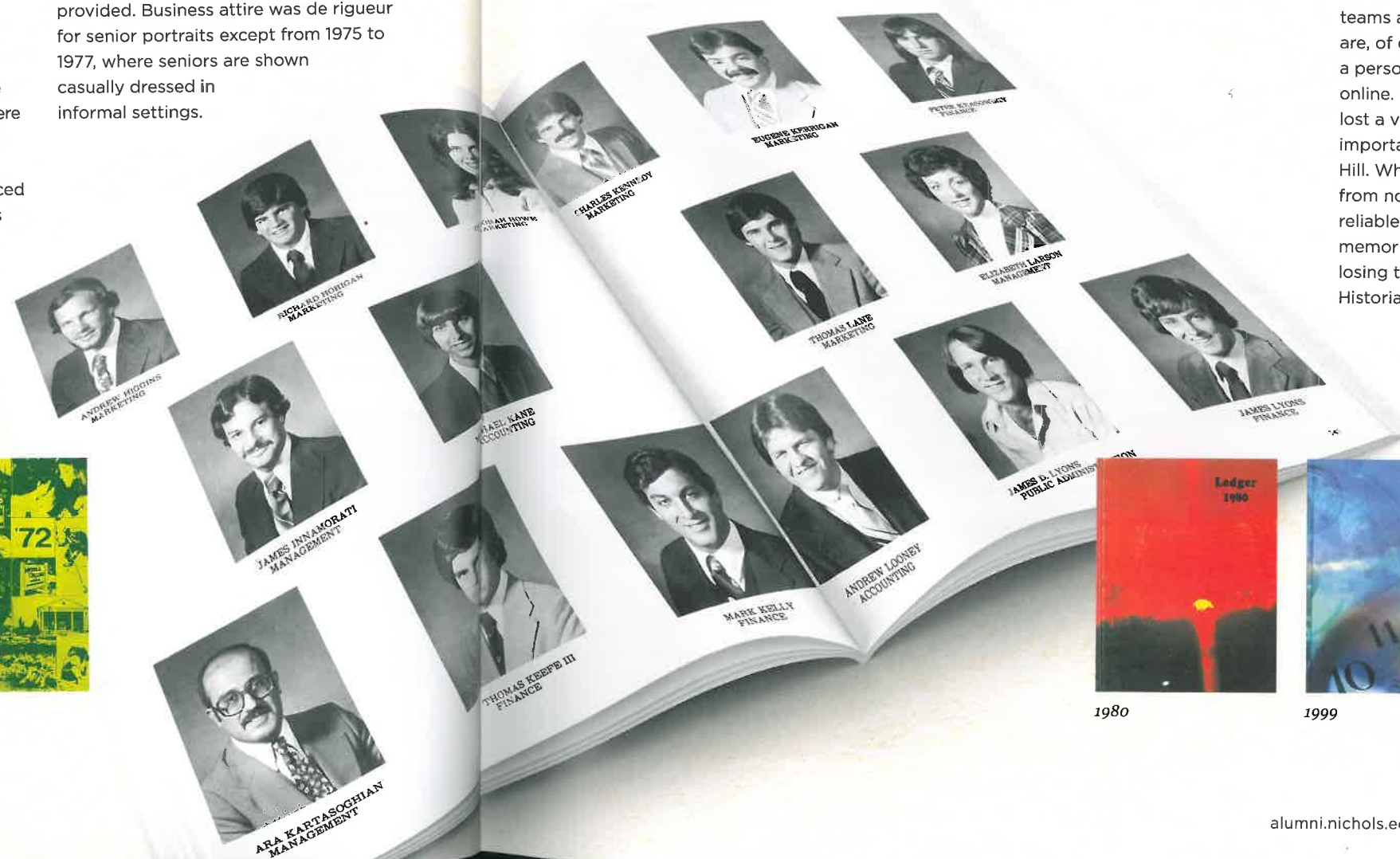
Since 1999, a number of our yearbooks have sported a full-color glossy cover.

Working on a yearbook gave students a chance to learn important skills related to photography, writing, advertising, sales, page layout, business management, and teamwork. It took a great deal of time and money. The editor of the 1975 *Ledger* noted that 800 hours were spent on its production and it cost \$10,000, half of which came from the Student Government Association and half from advertisements and contributions; 4,000 photos were taken, of which "only" 600 were used.

Editing the yearbook offered a valuable leadership opportunity, typically held by males until the early '80s — within a decade or so of Nichols going coed — when women were taking leadership positions in many clubs and organizations, including the yearbook. After 1984, with only a few exceptions, women were at the helm and held the majority of yearbook staff positions.

2015 marked a sharp departure from the traditional yearbook format. Sporting the bicentennial logo and dozens of candid photos on a soft-bound cover, the 2015 *Ledger* — a mere 40 pages — was dedicated entirely to the senior activities. There are the usual portraits and superlatives, plus a few uncaptioned photos of various athletes and photos commemorating special events, such as Homecoming, Boston Trip, Bisonfest, Senior Day, and Commencement. The 2016 *Ledger* followed the same format.

The first yearbook staff in 1932 wrote: "It has been the earnest endeavor of the *Tower* Staff to present the students of Nichols a reliable record of the past year. It is hoped *The Tower* will help bring back a number of pleasant memories in the years to come." Sadly, due to costs and a lack of student interest in producing one, Nichols has decided to cease publication of a yearbook. Senior portraits will continue to be taken and athletics will continue to keep records and photos of teams and individuals. Current students are, of course, able to create and maintain a personal record of their college years online. With its passing, however, we have lost a valuable resource for preserving an important record of our history on the Hill. What will happen 50 or more years from now when former students seek "a reliable record" or repository of "pleasant memories"? Future alumni may well regret losing the permanence of ink on paper. Historians certainly will.



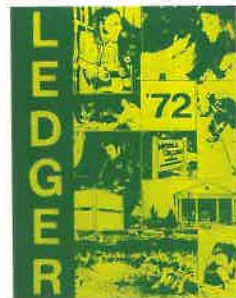
1932



1947



1959



1972



1980



1999



2015