Vanderbilt has always loved its trees.

Bishop Holland McTyeire planted them, nurtured them, and loved them so well that whenever one had to be felled in the name of progress, he felt compelled to turn his back. James Kirkland, Vanderbilt’s second chancellor, found their loss so painful that he was said by his biographer to leave town on occasion to avoid witnessing their destruction. Chancellors Harvie Branscom and sufficient remorse about sacrificing two choice hardy ginkgoes to make way for Kissam Quadrangle that, upon his retirement, he paid for replacements out of his own pocket.

Trees, some of them older than the United States, have provided shelter against every May Commencement. They have yielded branches and berries and room for a hundred basking of the greens. They have provided samples for generations of Nashville school children’s leaf identification projects. They have endured the insults of countless poster malls, Hitchcock-esque invasions of wrappings—and a few errant student drivers.

If you have visited campus recently, witnessed the ubiquitous silhouette of construction cranes against the winter sky, and wondered how long the trees could hold their own against the relentless march of progress, rest assured, Vanderbilt’s trees, numbering perhaps 6,000 by one educated guess, are as cherished as ever, though no one has left town lately at the prospect of a squirrel’s demise. In an average year, Vanderbilt plants several hundred trees to replace those that lose from wind, age, disease, or the stress of living amidst thousands of humans.

Vanderbilt has one of the most beautiful and well-maintained campuses in the country,” observes William Shan, director of admissions. “The trees are a major part of that. Our surveys of admitted students show that the campus setting is a powerful draw in attracting students.”

An 1879 catalog published six years after Vanderbilt’s founding shows that the campus already featured at least 300 species of trees and shrubs. Bishop McTyeire, the University’s visionary first president and headless patron, transformed what was largely treeless land, planting dozens of species himself, including magnolias, elms, tulip poplars, and the oaks that still grow near the Divinity School. Many were saplings taken from the hills of Hillsboro Pike and raised in an arboretum on campus.

Chancellor Kirkland’s wife, Elizabeth, organized faculty wives and other women to form the Vanderbilt Garden Club, which over the years has been responsible for the planting of many Vanderbilt trees, including the magnolia screens that line West End and 21st avenues.

In 1988, the Vanderbilt campus was granted official arboretum status by the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta. Vanderbilt’s collection of trees focuses on native species maintained to look much as they would in nature, with a minimum of pruning or shearing. Many of them are identified with tags, thanks to a 1968 gift made by Mrs. James Mapheus Smith, a former Vanderbilt librarian, in honor of her husband, who earned a Vanderbilt doctorate in 1931.

“Quite a number of other colleges and universities have arboreta,” notes Pan Sey, University landscape architect. “But they are more commonly found among universities with a horticulture or landscape department. What also makes Vanderbilt’s arboretum stand out is that it’s not a separate entity. The entire campus is an arboretum.”

That’s good for the people who study and work at Vanderbilt, but not always ideal for the trees. “We can’t just set spindly baby trees out there in the middle of a big lawn where people might be tempted to take shortcuts,” Sey says. “We have to buy good-sized, sturdy specimens to give trees a fighting chance.”

Sey, who is primarily responsible for choosing the new trees that Vanderbilt plants each fall and winter, concentrates on species that do well in the Nashville region and are naturally disease-resistant. Most are brought from nurseries around McMinnville, Tennessee. Vanderbilt’s trees generally are tough enough to withstand the drought conditions of the past two years. But it’s possible to kill them with kindness.

“We want trees, but people also enjoy green lawns,” says Sey.

“Our mature trees grew up not having supplemental water until about 10 years ago, when we began irrigating our large open lawn spaces. Some of the trees, particularly sugar maples, haven’t handled it real well. In a forest setting, instead of lawn

The University’s Office of Publications and Design published The Trees of Vanderbilt in 1994. Seven different walks on campus are described in this small volume, along with information about many native American species found in Vanderbilt’s arboretum. Copies are available at the Vanderbilt Bookstore for $10.95 each; call 615/343-8309.
you'd find fallen leaves and rotted wood, which sets up a wonderful kind of biological soup for fungi that draw on the nutrients at the tree roots. That's what really makes trees happy.”

**Revenge of the Trees**

Trees also suffer from soil compacted by lawn mowers, other heavy equipment—and rarely cared-for hot air. An elm that flourished outside the Peabody Administration Building was known as the tree of knowledge. Educational administrators gathered under its summertime canopy for discussions. When it died, Peabody president Bruce Payne wrote in 1936 that it had been talked to death. Most of the time trees suffer in silence to the human insults inflicted on them. Occasionally they strike back.

“Two years ago a creeper was walking under a tree when a hedge apple fell and struck her on the head,” remembers Mark Petty, who as director of general services oversees day-to-day maintenance of Vanderbilt’s grounds. “We don't plant poison ivy anywhere, but we've got one in front of Franklin Hall that drogh fruit on the sidewalk, it's slippery and we spend a lot of time washing it off. Anything with a root is a problem,” adds Petty. “And the fruit from female ginko trees creates a real odor problem. Until recently you couldn't tell the males from the females before they were 10 or 12 years old and started bearing fruit. Nowadays you can buy male ginko trees, but we still have plenty of stinky females around.”

Last year during Reunion a maple crashed to the ground between Cannibou and Garland Hall after a rainstorm. Following the ice storm that paralyzed Nashville in 1994, Vanderbilt’s grounds crews and contracted tree surgeons spent months clearing broken branches and damaged trees.

On a day-to-day basis, two of Vanderbilt’s Landscape gardeners, Peter Pent and Lee Langley, are primarily responsible for the University’s tree and shrub maintenance. Part of their job is periodic ground care and looking for dead or dead wood and removing it before it creates a hazard for humans. It's not a job for sissies. Besides being willing to climb tall trees with only a rope and saddle, you have to expect the unexpected. “We couldn't get a bully recently because there was a nest of yellow jack-els that was way too active,” Pent says. Squirrels whose nests are threatened can turn aggressive. Juniper branches scratch the skin. And there's the weather. "The cold doesn't bother me. You can put on enough clothes," says Pent. "But the heat of summer is pretty tough up there." Still, there are compensations for working on Vanderbilt’s trees. "Clearing demands a bit of engineering," says Pent. "It takes physical and mental skills. For me, it's just a rush."

"Nest around and ask us what we're doing," Langley adds. "They need frequent questions because you're not cutting down that tree are you?"

**Planting for Posthery**

As Vanderbilt has undergone a building growth spurt, the need for space and the pressure on trees and other plantings grows. But University officials are keenly aware that Vanderbilt's trees are part of its identity. "In a number of cases, construction decisions have been driven by the desire to maintain existing trees and green space," notes Petty, "and even a few of those involved agree that a particular tree should be sacrificed in order to facilitate survival."

"I don't know where other schools have, but at Vanderbilt, nearly every tree on campus is considered by students to be a personal part of the university's history."

"I'm fond of the oak trees in the Fleming Yard," Pent says. "They're the oldest part of the campus."

"We're like a family here at Vanderbilt. Everyone here is so proud of the university's history and traditions."

**NOTABLE**

**NOMINEE FOR THE METHUSelah AWARD**

The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.

**METHUSELAH AWARD**

Nominees for the Methuselah award:

- The massive hemlock near Garland Hall growing at the time of the American Revolution and also known as the bennissance tree.