In dramatic contrast to its opening in 1906 with two unfinished buildings and 102 students, the University of Florida entered the 21st century with a population of almost 70,000 students, faculty, and support personnel occupying over 900 buildings and 2,000 acres of land. Tracing its roots to a parent institution founded in 1853, the University of Florida will celebrate its sesquicentennial in 2003. While the history of the University has been well recorded, the unique architectural evolution of the campus and its preservation has not been documented. This paper seeks to bridge that gap and suggest documentation that might better insure the ongoing preservation and compatible growth of the University of Florida.

On the night of July 5, 1905, a telegram was read on the courthouse square that designated Gainesville as the site of the new University of Florida and the local newspaper reported “everything that could make a noise was put to test.” The Legislature had adopted the much debated Buckman Act that would create four new universities to consolidate the resources of eight scattered institutions. Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward had appointed a Board of Control for Institutions of Higher Learning to select the sites. There was vigorous competition for the future site of the University of Florida, but Gainesville Mayor William Ruben Thomas made an offer the Board could not refuse – 500 acres west of the city, capital funding, and water without charge.

The Buckman Act consolidation process did not meet with universal enthusiasm. The citizens of Lake City vigorously protested the loss of the Florida Agricultural College and no local residents could be hired to assist in the transfer of books and equipment to Gainesville. As a result, the move had to be completed by faculty members, who packed and escorted the wagons. A mathematics professor, described as a man of powerful physique, rode in the first wagon with a rifle across his knees for the day long trip by dirt road to Gainesville. Terra cotta plaques, christened the “anguished scholars,” relieved the unpretentious forces in the establishment of the university in Gainesville.

In August of 1905, the Board of Control met in Jacksonville to interview architects and select two for a competition. «After several ballots, Mr. Klutho of Jacksonville and Mssrs. Edwards and Walter of Columbia, S.C. were elected as such architects.» The following morning, the competition was described to the two architectural firms. The submission would include a plan of the campus and elevations of principal buildings. The loser would be paid $300 and the winner would become University Architect. The contenders agreed. Henry John Klutho, later acclaimed as one of the most accomplished architects of early twentieth century Florida, submitted a Beaux Arts campus plan focused around the authoritative rotunda of the Administration Building. William Augustus Edwards presented a Collegiate Gothic image for the new University of Florida. The young state of Florida was seeking an architectural image for the new university that would compare favorably with respected institutions, and the Gothic image provided that association.

Following the selection of Edwards and adoption of the Collegiate Gothic, the Board ordered that comparative bids «for the construction of the 3 dorms shall be based upon the use of first sand lime brick, second artificial stone, third pressed brick.» After the bids were read, Architect Edwards was instructed to cut down the size of the buildings or to make other changes that would not affect «the usefulness or the architectural features of the buildings but that might reduce the cost of construction.»

Foreshadowing a persistent shortage of funding, faculty members were enlisted to perform extracurricular duties for no additional remuneration. The Board instructed an engineering professor to go to Gainesville and lay out the double arcs of the Edwards campus plan and locate the two dormitories “with substantial posts…” An agriculture professor was directed to supervise the planting of oak trees.

The new campus began with Buckman and Thomas Halls, named for the legislator and the mayor who were driving forces in the establishment of the university in Gainesville. Terra cotta plaques, christened the “anguished scholars,” relieved the unpretentious projecting bays and crenellated parapets of the sister buildings. Regional brick, cast moldings and plaques with relief details became distinctive features that would evolve into the second half of the century.

University President Andrew Sledd wrote in 1907, «I had some talk with Edwards, and it seems that he takes an unreasonable view of the [financial] situation. I told him that we could not deal with what might be ideally desirable but with what was both practical and practicable …» ¹ In 1908, the campus was still limited to the two initial buildings that accommodated virtually all functions, from dormitory to classroom to president’s office. Responding to the void of funding from the Legislature, President Sledd stated, “It will