
❖ Planting a Tree - A Brief History of SJSU ❖



"The laying of this cornerstone symbolizes the work which we of this generation are doing. We are laying the foundations of a new State. We are laying the foundations of an educational system. We must be careful to lay them properly, for the whole superstructure will conform to the character of its foundations. The foundation plan of our system of popular education must be broad, embracing the principles of justice and right, giving equal privileges to all classes of citizens."

"[How] great is the responsibility that rests upon us as the officers and guardians of this institution. We represent not only for the present, but for the future. We are now planting a tree whose growth coming generations will foster, and whose fruit they will gather. Let us do our work well, that those who come after us may follow our good example, and carry forward the great work which we shall transmit to them."

These bold statements were part of a speech delivered by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Oscar Fitzgerald in 1870 upon breaking ground for the first State Normal School at Washington Square in San José—a school that would eventually become SJSU. His words summarize well the significance of the placing of a school to train teachers in a developing area. The School helped the region to grow and provide opportunity for many and it has continued to do so as it became a Teacher's College and then in 1961, became part of the California College System (now CSU—California State University).



Photo of the mostly undeveloped "Washington Square" site in 1868.

*Photo was taken from the Santa Clara County Courthouse.
Source: King Library, California Room*

San José State University's long history—that has shaped education in California and the character of the City of San José, began in 1857 with Minn's Evening Normal School in San Francisco. It was originally a city school, becoming a state school by designation of the State Legislature in 1862. In 1870, the Normal School relocated to San José at Washington Square. This site—bounded by 4th, San Fernando, 7th and San Carlos Streets, was donated by the City of San José.

Many things have changed since SJSU began in 1857. In 1857, the Normal School's purpose was solely to train teachers. Today, while training of K-12 teachers remains a significant part of the University's activities, San José State offers over 130 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. In 1870, the population of the City of San José was about 9,000 people. Today, the City has a population exceeding 900,000 and San José State University itself has 30,000 students.



*The first California State Normal School building at Washington Square in San José (1872 – 1880)
Source: Historical Sketch of the State Normal School at San Jose, 1889*

SJSU History Timeline

- 1857—School founded in San Francisco as Minns' Evening Normal School
1862—School designated as the California State Normal School by the California Legislature
1867—*Acorn* begins as school paper containing essays, poems and educational notes
1870—Groundbreaking at the site of the Normal School at Washington Square in San José
1871—The California State Normal School moves from San Francisco to San José
1872—Edwin Markham graduates from the Normal School (poet who penned *The Man with the Hoe*)
1874—First senior class gift to the school presented (a tree)
1880—*Senior Journal* begins a 5-year publication run, published twice per year
1880—First Normal School Building at Washington Square destroyed by fire.
1881—Second Normal School Building completed to replace one destroyed the year before
1887—Renamed State Normal School by the California Legislature
1889—Charles W. Childs, a graduate of the California State Normal School (1867), becomes principal
1892—Football team organized
1897—High school constructed at northeast corner of Washington Square (4th and San Fernando)
1898—Student club Ero Sophian starts as a literary society, later becomes social club and then sorority Alpha Phi
1901—Author Jack London delivers a lecture; Dr. John Dewey delivers commencement address
1902—High school graduation becomes an entrance requirement
1904—First summer session held
1906—Some buildings condemned after the San Francisco Earthquake
1909—Cornerstone for new "quadrangle" building laid
1910—Tower Hall built
1911—Art Department formed
1914—Helen Keller delivers a lecture
1915—Edwin Markham delivers lecture on campus
1916—New grading system adopted (1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = passable, 4 = failure)
1921—Renamed San José State Teachers College
1922—Teachers College allowed to grant Bachelor of Art degrees
1923—The Student Body, organized in 1898, is renamed Associated Students
1924—Student election results in "Spartans" becoming the college nickname by 10 votes over "Golds"
1925—Publication of student writings called *The Quill* begins
1926—Enrollment passes 2500
1927—Speech and Drama Department created
1928—Women's gymnasium built
1928—Commerce Department formed (later to become the College of Business)
1929—Professor Henry Meade Bland named California Poet Laureate (second person to hold this title)
1932—New men's gymnasium dedicated and ground broken on new science building (now Washington Square Hall) on same day (2/4); Governor James Rolph, Jr. presided
1933—Ground broken on Spartan Stadium at South Campus
1934—*Spartan Daily* begins publication as campus newspaper, replacing the *State College Times*
1935—Renamed San José State College by California Legislature
1941—Football team in Hawaii for games against University of Hawaii when Pearl Harbor attacked
1943—Properties between 7th and 9th Streets acquired for university expansion
1944—Decision made to develop an engineering program
1946—College is allowed to offer graduate work leading to the general secondary credential
1947—Quonset huts erected to accommodate post-WWII growing student enrollment
1948—Publication of student writings called *Reed* begins (still published today)
1949—Master's Degrees awarded for the first time
1952—Spartan Memorial built using contributions from students, alums, faculty and friends
1954—Ceremony entitled "Engineers for Tomorrow" held to dedicate new Engineering Building
1955—Semester system reinstated after 27 years of the quarter system
1956-57—Centennial celebration; "Pioneers for 100 Years" is the theme
1961—College becomes part of the California State College system, later to become the California State University (CSU) System
1968—New College—an integrative sciences and humanities program begins as an experiment
1972—San José State College becomes CSU, San José -- marking the achievement of university status
1974—Steinbeck Research Center opens in Library Central
1974—Name changed to San José State University
1989—Event Center constructed
1993—Campus reaches cultural pluralism, with no ethnic majority
1994—San Carlos Street is closed, from 4th Street through 10th Street, unifying the campus
1999—SJSU and City of San José agree to build a joint library at 4th and San Fernando Streets
2002—Metropolitan University Scholar's Experience (MUSE) program created for first-year students
2003—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library opens (partnership of SJSU and the City of San José)
2005—Campus Village for students and employees opens. Smith-Carlos sculpture unveiled (10/17).

Key references: *Pioneers for One Hundred Years*, by Benjamin Franklin Gilbert, 1957; and *The Story of An Inspiring Past*, by Estelle Greathead, 1928.



For More Information

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