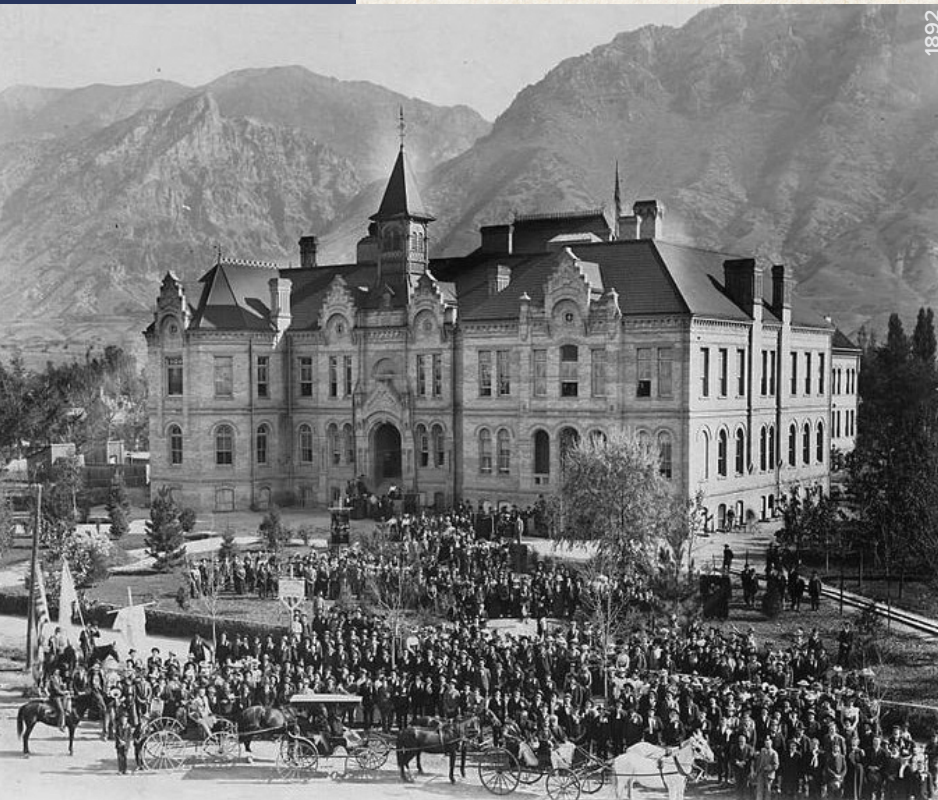


150

YEARS OF HUMANITY AT BYU

by Kira Christensen (Editing and Publishing '25)

A lot has changed at BYU since its beginning 150 years ago. These are some of the people and events that made the university and College of Humanities what they are today.



1891

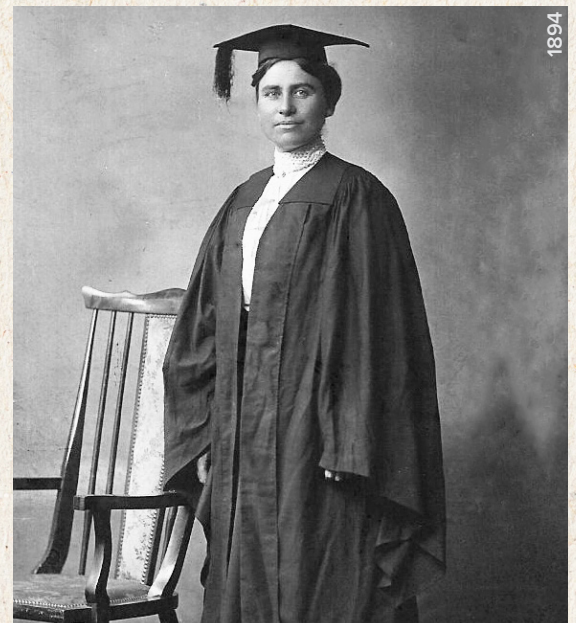
The school's first student newspaper, *The BYA Student*, ran from January to May and covered topics of interest like faculty spotlights, academic essays, and recent school events.

1892

The BYA building was dedicated on January 4, allowing the school to finally move out of a rented warehouse and into a permanent home of its own.

1894

Alice Louise Reynolds became the first woman to teach collegiate-level classes at BYA. She taught English, established the school's library, and became the first full-time female professor in 1911.



1875

President Brigham Young signed the deed of trust that established Brigham Young Academy (BYA).

1877

In addition to offering classes on philosophy and mathematics, the academy also taught German, BYA's first foreign language.

1881

James E. Talmage graduated from the Scientific Department and was awarded the school's very first college degree.



1870s

1880s

1890s

1904

BYA changed its name to Brigham Young University—a bold statement for a school with only 64 college-level students.

1906

The university plans to paint “BYU” on the mountainside, but after six hours of hard work hauling sand and limestone, workers had completed only the Y—plans for the other two letters were later abandoned, leaving only the familiar, iconic Y.



Photo from 1894 courtesy of Family Search, all other photos courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections

1914

Helen Keller visited campus and delivered a lecture so impactful that two different people mentioned it on the “High Lights of the Year” page in the next edition of the *Banyan* yearbook.



1915

Students studying German started BYU’s first language club with 75 members.

1924

The first “Light the Y” involved students carrying buckets of mattress batting soaked in kerosene up the mountain to light torches at the summit. A generator and strands of lights replaced the open fires in 1985.



1925

BYU juniors and seniors hosted a Wild West party in the Women’s Gymnasium. The firing of blank cartridges was so noisy the neighbors complained.



The Heber J. Grant Library—today’s Testing Center—was dedicated and housed 40,000 books and 35,000 pamphlets.



1938

The French Club hosts a Mardi Gras celebration.



1943

The US’s participation in WWII sparked an increased demand for language-trained soldiers; BYU streamlined its 10 existing language courses to meet student demand.

1917–1918

About 160 students and a handful of faculty served in WWI. On campus, wartime support efforts included sending care packages, fundraising, and knitting socks and sweaters.



1954

The David O. McKay Building housed modern language laboratories with cutting-edge learning technology, including audio and recording equipment.

1959

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and journalist Carl Sandburg delivered a forum address.

1962

Three English majors participated in CBS's 1962 *College Bowl*, becoming the fourth team ever to win four out of five games in the season.



Photos from 1959, 1962, and 1965 courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections; photo from 1976 by Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy; photo from 2021 by Audrey Droz; photo from 2023 courtesy of J. Scott Miller; all other photos by BYU Photo

1965

The College of Humanities was created, overseeing English, foreign languages, humanities, and Latin American studies.

The College sponsored BYU's first official study abroad in Salzburg, Austria, and 140 students attended.

New College Ends First Year



Bruce B. Clark, Dean

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences divided in two at the end of last year and both halves were recognized as independent colleges this year. The humanities half became the College of Humanities with Dr. Bruce Clark as dean. The new college consists of two departments: English and Languages, and three inter-departmental areas: Humanities, Latin American Studies and Linguistics. 1,137 majors were enrolled in the college.



The McKay building is the headquarters for the college.

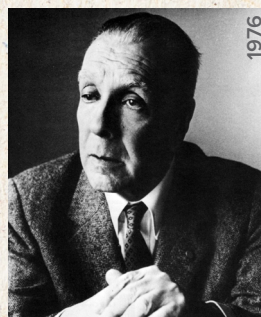
Faculty of The College of Humanities



In a Spanish language lab, students listen to tape recordings which will help improve their vocabulary and pronunciation.

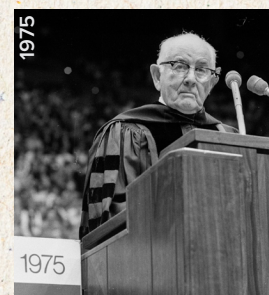
1968

German professor Joseph Baker instituted a weekly lecture series that quickly evolved into BYU's International Cinema (IC) program. Featured below left is Don Marshall, who helmed IC for decades and helped make it what it is today.



1975

President Spencer W. Kimball gave the Second Century address, providing valuable counsel about how to lead the university into its next century.



1976

Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges gave a lecture and Q&A session on campus.

1978

The precursor to today's Language Immersion Student Residence began, opening with the Russian house and later expanding into a complex of nine language houses.

1950s

1960s

1970s



1984

BYU hosted its first Welsh poetry competition at the request of visiting Welsh poet Leslie Norris.

BYU's football team won the national championship.

1985

Foreign-born student Sharlene Wells won Miss America.

1989

President Howard W. Hunter dedicated the BYU Jerusalem Center.



1980s



2000

1992 Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott made the first of two visits to BYU to read to students.

2002

BYU was chosen by the US government as one of four schools to host a Language Flagship program, helping students achieve professional-level proficiency in Chinese.

2006

President Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the Joseph Fielding Smith Building, current home of the College of Humanities.

2007

International lecturer and author Amanita Sow Fall visited campus and gave three lectures, including one in French.

2021-2022

The annual *Open Door Report* ranked BYU no. 1 in the nation for number of students on study abroad.



2023

BYU became the first university to offer an Azerbaijani class; the university now teaches 84 languages regularly, more than any other university in the US.

1993

The BYU Museum of Art opened featuring 178 pieces of Etruscan art from the Vatican's Gregorian Museum.



1996

BYU becomes the first place in the Mountain West to host the Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE) exam, offering international Spanish accreditation to citizens of non-Spanish-speaking countries.



2025

BYU celebrates its 150th anniversary and the College of Humanities marks its 60th anniversary, commemorating decades of learning, serving, and lighting the world.

2018

The Arabic Flagship Center opened, making BYU one of only four universities nationwide to host two flagship programs.

1990s-2010s

2020s-CURRENT