
❖ October 20, 1870 ~ October 20, 2000 ❖

The Relevance of October 20 to the History of the City of San José and San José State University



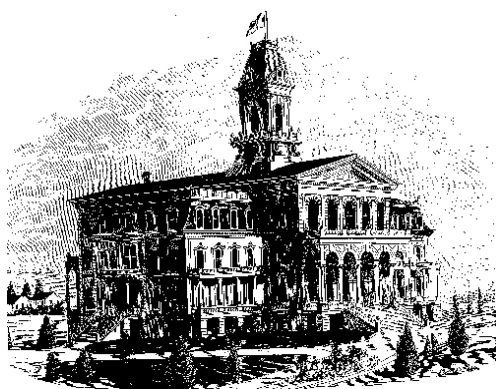
As the first public institution of higher education on the West Coast, San José State University has a rich history tied to California's history, as well as that of the City of San José and the educational system of California. The history of San José State began in San Francisco in 1857 with a school for training teachers—Minns' Evening Normal School. This school became the California Normal School, created by the California legislature in 1862.

In subsequent years, the State Board of Education wanted to move the school out of San Francisco. As Principal William T. Lucky noted in a December 1869 report, a new building was needed and "the best interests of the school and the pupils attending will be promoted by locating where there is more quiet and fewer temptations." Several cities attempted to get the school to relocate by offering a variety of enticements. San José provided the students (190 of them) free train passes to visit the city on December 21, 1869, to view possible locations for the school.

Why San José? State Superintendent of Public Instruction Oscar P. Fitzgerald noted in his Third Biennial Report to California Governor Haight, covering the school years 1868 and 1869, that San José was the "proper location" for the school because of its climate, availability of sufficient space for school buildings and boarding of students, its accessibility from all parts of the state, and because "the people are intelligent, hospitable and moral." He also noted that "at San José the Normal School would be an object of local pride and attachment."

San José was selected by the California legislature on March 8, 1870. At the time, San José had a population of just over 9,000. The city was served by two railroads and in 1869 the Southern Pacific line had been extended to Gilroy. The Board of Trustees settled upon the site known as "Washington Square" and agreed to construct a main building at a cost not to exceed \$45,000. Washington Square comprised a 27-acre tract of land bordered by San Fernando, San Carlos, Fourth and Seventh Streets. A school named Washington Square was located on the northeast corner of this tract.

October 20, 1870: The cornerstone of the school at the Washington Square site, donated by the City of San José, was laid on October 20, 1870. This event was celebrated by students and community members and government officials. Over 3,000 people attended the festivities that began with a parade from City Hall up First Street to San Antonio Street and then east to Washington Square. A time capsule, containing such items as a copy of the California school laws, a normal school diploma, a local paper, a copy of the San José city charter and an account (in Spanish) of the first public school in the city (built in 1811), was placed beneath the cornerstone.



The First California Normal School at Washington Square in San José (1872 - 1880)



View of the California Normal School Looking Down San Antonio Street from Second Street

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Fitzgerald delivered a speech stating:

"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."

The laying of the cornerstone "will long be remembered as a prominent feature in the history of our city."

*Santa Clara Argus
October 22, 1870*

The superintendent noted that his enthusiasm stemmed from the beauty of the location and the significance of laying a cornerstone that really symbolized laying the foundation of California's educational system.

What Did Students of the Normal School Study? Pupils of the Normal School undertook a two-year program of study that included such topics as math, grammar, geography, spelling, moral lessons, rhetoric, physiology, history, botany, astronomy, chemistry, and bookkeeping. In 1870, Principal Lucky recommended that the pupils study and memorize the U.S. and California Constitutions. Students were also given a copy of the school law of California.

The Libraries of Washington Square

The school's library, beginning with a few hundred volumes, was housed in the Normal School Building from 1870-1910. In 1902, the Carnegie Public Library opened at the corner of Fourth and San Fernando Streets, the land having been donated back to the city by the Normal School. The site of the Carnegie Library was purchased back by the State College in 1936 and became the Student Union. The San José Public Library moved to Market Street and in 1990 the main public library was dedicated at its current location.



This 1955 aerial photo shows the Carnegie Library building(then the Student Union) in the lower lefthand (NW) corner of the campus. The Library Building(Wahlquist South) and the Library Annex (Wahlquist Central) lie to the right. The Clark Library was later built on a portion of the empty land shown at the top of the photo.



San José's Carnegie Public Library at Washington Square (1902-1936)

Starting in 1910 the College's library was housed in the north wing of Tower Hall until a Library Building was completed in 1941 at Fourth and San Antonio. In 1956 the Library Annex was added and Library North opened in 1961. The new Clark Library building was completed in 1981, but could not hold the entire collection, part of which remained in the old library buildings, renamed Wahlquist South, Central and North.

October 20, 2000: The Wahlquist buildings were demolished in 2000 to make way for the joint library of San José State University and the City of San José - with the official groundbreaking ceremony celebrated on October 20, 2000. The *new* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library is scheduled to open in the fall of 2003.

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