

The Founding of Stanford University

An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County

by
José Macías
144 Hollywood Ave,
San José, CA. 95112
(408) 295-0347

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Introduction

Stanford University has become one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the United States. The founding of this university was accomplished by a prosperous intellectual known as Leland Stanford. In beloved memory of his son, Leland Stanford Jr., who died prematurely, Mr. Stanford and his wife Jane decided to establish a memorial to him. What started out as a simple plan turned into a major achievement in the field of education. Leland and Jane Stanford's indomitable struggle to establish a distinct academic facility made Stanford University a thriving organization of high performance learning.

The Story of Leland Stanford

Leland Stanford was a very outgoing and determined individual. He was born in Watervliet Township, New York, on March 9, 1824. Leland was the fifth of eight children in his family and was the son chosen to study for a professional career. He spent a total of four years in school, first at Clinton Liberal Institute, and then at Cazanovia Seminary. At the age of twenty-one, he attended the law office of Wheaton, Doolittle, and Hadley, located in Albany. Three years later, he matriculated and entered the practice of law in 1848. In October he started an office in Port Washington, Wisconsin. As time passed, his law office became highly esteemed and respected. In 1850, he married Jane Eliza Lathrop, daughter of a wealthy Albany merchant. Leland's good fortune came to a halt when a massive fire ruined his law office in 1852.(1) He decided to join his brothers in the state of California and left his wife with her parents in Albany. For a period of three years, Leland was the Stanford Brothers' storekeeper in Mother Lode mining camps. Finally, in 1855, he set up his own business by buying the Sacramento store of Stanford Brothers. He returned to Albany for Jane and decided to settle permanently in California with her. As a merchant, Leland acquired great wealth from his stores. As he continued to buy land, his fortune increased.

Leland Stanford was a very active leader in California society. He became the foremost leader in organizing the Republican Party in California. In 1861, he was elected Governor at age thirty-seven. By doing this, he took on the responsibility of maintaining California in the Union. In the early 1860's, Leland participated with three Sacramento merchants in the making of the Central Pacific Railroad. This was a western connection of the first transcontinental railroad. Leland became the president of the company and

was the most active in accomplishing the obstacle. Even though the undertaking of the railroad connection left its owners in debt, on May 10, 1869, the two railroads connected at Promontory, Utah. The objective was finally completed. The connection not only multiplied Leland's multi-million dollar fortune, it also resulted in new industries, rich lands, and prosperity for California.

After the death of Leland Jr., in 1884, Mr. and Mrs. Stanford established a university as a memorial to their beloved son. When this institution was opened in 1891, Leland Stanford seemed to have fulfilled every desire in his life. He died in his sleep in Palo Alto on June 21, 1893, during his second term as a United States Senator. His body was placed next to his son's in the Stanford family mausoleum.

Leland Stanford Jr.

Leland Stanford Jr. was a youth of promise. He was born on May 14, 1868, in the eighteenth year of his parents' marriage. Leland Jr. was tall and slender. He was a smart student who was always eager to learn new materials. In 1876, his father bought a 650-acre portion of Rancho San Francisquito to utilize as a country home. His parents did this to get young Leland Jr. acquainted with outdoor activities. Leland Jr. cherished life on the Palo Alto ranch. He loved horses and was a skilled horseman and marksman. He got along well with all of this father's workers and was respected by them. Leland Jr. was specifically interested in machinery. When he came across it, he was pleased and wanted to learn every detail about it. One example of his interest in machinery is demonstrated by his help in building the track of his small-gauge railroad that traveled through the Palo Alto Estate.

Leland Jr. was a very intelligent young man. He excelled in the areas of languages and history. Andrew D. White, president of Cornell University, once complimented Leland and Jane Stanford of Leland Jr., "I remember especially being struck by his manliness and his simple, substantial, thoughtful character which was already definitely formed in him."⁽²⁾ Young Leland learned how to speak French fluently. His visits to Europe helped him practice the French language by interacting with other people. Leland Jr. liked to collect pieces of history during these exciting trips. He had his own collection of antiques and already had plans to establish a museum in San Francisco. He thought his museum would educate others who did not have the privileges of traveling.

In May 1883, Leland Jr. and his family went on a trip to Europe. During the trip, he explored many interesting places. In Paris, he reviewed archaeological studies and met various artists and collectors. In November he went on sojourns through France, Italy, Genoa, Venice, Vienna, the Danube, Constantinople, and Athens. They continued in January through Brindisi, Naples, and then to Rome. Young Leland became sick in Athens. As the family advanced through Naples his illness continued. In Rome, his state of health worsened and turned dangerous. The family then traveled to Florence. There his status was identified as a mild case of typhoid fever.(3) After three weeks, his illness neutralized. Then suddenly, the illness struck stronger than ever. The skilled physicians could do nothing about it. On the morning of March 13, 1884, just several weeks before his sixteenth birthday, young Leland died. In a brief stay in Paris, Leland Junior's body was mourned in the American Church Rue de Berri. There, Pastor Rev. Augustus F. Beard gave Mr. Stanford valuable advice on establishing an institution as a memorial to his son.(4) The Pastor thought that if an institution was to be founded as a memorial, it should be immense, with a wide variety of departments.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanford decided to place Leland Jr. at rest in the Palo Alto farm. This was done because it was young Leland's favorite home. His corpse was allocated in a temporary mausoleum near the house. The family mausoleum was finished in 1889. After the death of Mr. Stanford in 1893, the two bodies were placed in the new mausoleum.

Establishing a Memorial

Leland and Jane Stanford were heartbroken after the death of their only child. The night of Leland Junior's death, Mr. Stanford dreamed of his son saying, "Father, do not say that you have nothing to live for...Live for humanity." (5) As Mr. Stanford woke the following morning, he thought, "The children of California shall be my children." (6) With this thought, he could not decide whether to dedicate his money towards a great hospital or university. After several days of deep thought, Mr. and Mrs. Stanford decided to establish a prominent university as a memorial to their deceased son. Mr. Stanford had wanted to use his fortune towards public benefit even before the death of his child. His busy schedule had been the only obstacle that had kept him from accomplishing this goal.(7)

The Stanfords thought that if the university they were going to form was to be a common one, there was no use in creating it. The ideal institution they had in mind would prepare students for promising roles in the future. It would also be open to both sexes and be affordable to all qualified individuals who were eager to learn. In an interview Mr. Stanford said, "This school will educate boys and girls in such practical industries as will enable them to go out into the world equipped for useful labor, with such knowledge as will be of service to them in the battle for bread." (8)

In 1884, on the Stanford's return to America, they visited some of the best schools in the country. They went on these expeditions in hope of seeking advice and ideas for the university they had in mind. Among the many that they visited were Cornell, Harvard, Yale, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From these visits Mr. and Mrs. Stanford learned valuable information regarding an institution, such as the cost of

building one and important people they should consult. In November, Leland Stanford and his wife returned to their home in San Francisco. The two were ready to take the first steps in establishing Leland Stanford Junior University.

Founding and Planning

On the Stanford's return to California in November 1884, they had to pass authorized necessities to establish the university. The first step was to receive an approval to fund the university by the state's legislature. The Endowment Act, as it was called, passed unanimously in the California legislature. The act was signed by the Governor in March 9, 1885, the date of Mr. Stanford's sixty-first birthday. The next obstacle in the way was the Grant of Endowment, which was carried out on November 11, 1885. This grant established the institution, provided its endowment, described its structure, and stated the trustees and their positions. In it, Mr. Stanford emphasized the importance of preparing students for future jobs. Stanford University became the highest endowed private university in the United States at the time. Almost reaching \$20,000,000, the endowment made it four times as well endowed as Harvard or Columbia University.(9) In November 14, 1885, the Founding Grant was executed. Twenty-four trustees met at the Stanford's home in San Francisco to participate in the event. That day, the Grant of Endowment was read by Leland Stanford and the agreement was quickly signed by the trustees. Leland Stanford Junior University was officially founded.

In August of 1886, Mr. and Mrs. Stanford were met by Francis A. Walker and Frederick Law Olmstead. Walker was the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, while Olmstead was one of the top landscaping architects in America. Since the University was to be constructed on the 8,200 acres of the Palo Alto ranch, the three went on a search to find the best location for building. After some quarreling over the sight of the university, they decided to construct it on the flat alfalfa fields. The institution, the Stanfords argued, was going to need a flat surface in which to enlarge in

the future.(10) Another possible reason for building the university on the flat lands could have been the fact that Leland Jr. enjoyed horseback riding in that area. For about a period of two months, Olmstead and Walker researched the Palo Alto farm closely. They suggested that the university have one-story buildings and be constructed of supportive stone.

Towards the end of 1886, Charles Allerton Coolidge was selected as the architect of the university. A coalition of Coolidge and two others had established Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, followers of the skilled architect, H. H. Richardson. Richardson had been recognized for his dominance of Romanesque architecture. Frederick Olmstead's plan for the university included an inner quadrangle of twelve one-story buildings and a Memorial Church. In April 26, 1887, Rutan and Coolidge traveled to San Francisco to discuss the construction of the university with the founders. Even though it would take another six months to start the actual building of the institution, Mr. Stanford insisted on laying the cornerstone on May 14, 1887, the nineteenth anniversary of Leland Stanford Jr.'s birth. In the closing speech of the ceremony, Rev. Horatio Stebbins said:

It is fit that the cornerstone of this edifice should be layed on the anniversary of the birth of him who, while yet a mere youth, first suggested the founding of the university....It is fit that both his name and the names of those who have executed his behest's should be enrolled high upon the scroll of fame, and of the benefactors of the human race. (11)

The laying of the cornerstone marked the beginning of the massive university that was to be constructed.

Shaping the University

A month after the cornerstone was laid in 1887, a surplus of more than one-hundred men went to work on the university. The Inner Quadrangle, which was to be the basis of the university, consisted of twelve classroom buildings and three engineering departments. The center space of the quadrangle was to be reserved for the future construction of the Memorial Church. The Quad was built of textured sandstone, brought from a quarry south of San Jose. The construction of the university advanced very slowly for many reasons. For example, the shaping of the sandstone blocks, the carving of the capitals and arches, and the placing of the red tile roofs, took patience and plenty of time to perform.

Another problem that faced the university was the inability to find a successful president. Mr. Stanford struggled to find the perfect president for his institution. He offered large sums of money to the presidents of Harvard, Yale, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but in each offer he was turned down because none of these presidents would desert their institution.(12) As he talked to the presidents of these universities, he was advised to confer with David Starr Jordan, the president of the University of Indiana. In March 1891, Jordan was appointed president of Stanford University. Even though the forty-year-old president had little time to gather a faculty, he managed to have a promising young group of fifteen the day the university was inaugurated. The two dormitories, Encina and Roble Hall, finished construction in the summer of 1891. In addition, ten cottages were built along the Alvarado Road for housing faculty members. The university was ready for its opening date.

Due to all of the problems the university faced, the opening date was postponed three times. The first in May 14, 1888, the second in May 14, 1889, and the third in the summer of 1890. Finally, in October 1, 1891, the university opened. An impressive 465 students showed up, almost double the 250 that had been expected. (13) At the opening ceremony Leland Stanford remarked:

I speak for Mrs. Stanford, as well as for myself, for she has been my active and sympathetic coadjutor and is co-grantor with me in the endowment and establishment of this University...This ceremony marks an epoch in our lives, for we see in part the realization of the hopes and efforts of years; for you, faculty and students, the work begins now.(14)

The university faced many problems at first. More faculty members were needed, faculty housing needed an increase, and materials arrived late. Somehow the institution surpassed this period of unrest. When Leland Stanford died in June 21, 1893, his wife, Jane, took on full responsibility for Stanford University.

Expansion of the University

After the death of Leland Stanford, many problems confronted the university. The financial situation at Stanford was very unstable, and Mrs. Stanford had to pay a large amount of railroad bonds to the government. Many people advised Jane Stanford to close the institution down. They argued that keeping the university open would be too big of a task to perform. Regardless of all this chaos, Mrs. Stanford succeeded in keeping the institution open. Impressively, she began to augment the campus.

During the expansion, the first buildings were formulated in the Outer Quad. Charles Coolidge had projected these buildings before he left the campus in 1893. These buildings consisted of eight multi-story and six one-story buildings and the Memorial Arch. Coolidges' plans were closely followed, but some changes were made. The construction of these buildings started in 1898 and ended in 1906, when Geology Corner was completed. In addition to these buildings, Mrs. Stanford had others in mind. Memorial Church, the Chemistry Building, a new library, and a new gymnasium were all to be constructed. Prior to the death of her husband, the Stanfords had decided to build a church on campus. This church was to be the main structure of the institution.

The Memorial Church was also designed by Coolidge, but some changes were made by Clinton Day, an architect from San Francisco. Mrs. Stanford traveled to Europe to decide on the interior and exterior of the religious structure. She selected carvings, windows, paintings, and many other religious masterpieces. In January 25, 1903, the Memorial Church was dedicated in memory of her late husband, Leland Stanford. Several months later, the Chemistry Building was finished. After a few months, a larger

library and gymnasium started construction. These were not accomplished, however, due to the 1906 earthquake.

In a terrible incident, Mrs. Stanford accidentally drank strychnine, which somehow got in her glass of Poland water. She became sick and was advised by her doctors to go on a vacation to relax. In February 1905, she sailed to Hawaii. She died in February 28, 1905, in Honolulu. Her funeral was held in Stanford's Memorial Church several days later, and her body was transferred to the family mausoleum.

1906 Earthquake

On April 18, 1906, at 5:13 a.m., the earth shook the grounds of Stanford University. The first shock lasted a period of forty-seven seconds and resulted in major destruction. Fortunately for the students and staff, class was not in session, for if they would have witnessed the disaster in the institution, many people would have been killed. As a result, only two people were killed at the university. One was a fireman named Otto Gerdes, while the other was a student known as Junius R. Hanna.(15) Four others experienced only minor injuries. Edith R. Mirrielees, an English major at Stanford wrote:

From the engineering block, masses of steam rose volcano wise; from the fallen church and arch quantities of fine, bluish dust mingled with steam, giving to the whole an appalling appearance of present danger, but hiding, for a moment, the extent of the injury. As the dust settled, ruin after ruin stood out in sharp relief against the blue of the morning sky.(16)

The damage to the university was very extensive in some areas. As the tower and heavy flying buttresses crushed the inside of Memorial Church, the strong impact wrecked the north wall of the university. Besides this chaos, chimes, clocks, stained-glass windows, and the carved pulpit were slightly harmed. In addition, Memorial Church and the new additions to the museum were thoroughly destroyed. The unfinished library and gymnasium, and many arches in the university were totaled. The Inner Quadrangle's main entrance arches were harmed partially. Most of the Outer Quadrangle received only a small amount of destruction. However, the walls of the four corner buildings were ruined severely. The Chemistry Building, along with the Forge and Wood Shop, also suffered major demolition. There were many other buildings that received less damage, such as broken chimneys and furniture.

At the end of the catastrophe, the cost for the restoration of the university seemed unbearable. President Jordan estimated the cost to be about \$2,800,000, but then raised it to \$4,000,000. This exaggeration was corrected later on by the Commission of Engineers to be about \$650,000, not including Memorial Church. The rebuilding of Memorial Church, they argued, was to cost about \$600,000 alone.(17)

With all of this damage inflicted on the university and the cost of restoration in mind, President Jordan defied all odds and carried Stanford University out of its crisis.

Repairs

Immediate action was taken after the earthquake occurred. The Quadrangles were quickly roped off and guards stood at the entrances to prevent possible injury. The rubble that surrounded the university was immense, but its removal started as soon as possible. Towards the end of June the reconstruction of the campus was handled by a Commission of Engineers which included Professors Marx, Wing, and Durand.(18) These engineers made strong efforts to have the institution ready for its opening date in August. During the reconstruction process, the university was troubled by a two-week labor strike. This strike resulted in loss of valuable time, but the constructors' valiant exertions proved successful. Incredibly, Stanford University was ready to re-open. While many buildings needed repairs, only essential improvements were made before the re-opening in August. The reconstruction of other buildings continued on for many years.

The new library and gymnasium, and the Museum annex, were never reconstructed. Memorial Arch was also not restored. These were neglected due to their little significance to the university. Memorial Church, however, was fully restored in part because of its religious importance. The impressive church was worked on for several years and reopened in 1913. It was finally finished in 1916. President Jordan once wrote to his friend, "The Memorial Church, splendidly built but wrecked by the fall of its spire and flying buttresses, touches us deeply...But the new library, gymnasium, and Museum annex, crushed like a pie set on edge, we have no feeling for."(19)

Conclusion

The founding of Stanford University was accomplished through struggle and determination. It is the story of two individuals whose strong impetus resulted in an educational breakthrough. Even though the Stanfords encountered several obstacles in the process of completing their university, they were never reluctant to handle any problems in their path. Their powerful leadership was a big support to the institution in many ways. They helped build it both financially and morally. As a result of their guidance, Stanford University has been transformed into a flourishing world-class university.

Endnotes

1. Peter C. Allen, Stanford: From the Foothills to the Bay (Stanford, California: Stanford Alumni Association & Stanford Historical Society, 1980), p. 28.
2. Orrin L. Elliot, Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years (Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press, 1937), p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 14.
5. Ibid., p. 11.
6. Kevin Starr, Americans and the California Dream: 1850-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 307.
7. Elliot, Op. Cit., p. 14.
8. Ibid., p. 18.
9. Starr, Op. Cit., p. 308.
10. Allen, Op. Cit., p. 16.
11. Elliot, Op. Cit., p. 35.
12. Starr, Op. Cit., p. 307.
13. Allen, Op. Cit., p. 26.
14. Ibid., p. 28.
15. Elliot, Op. Cit., p. 146
16. Allen, Op. Cit., p. 41.
17. Elliot, Op. Cit., p. 148.
18. Ibid., p. 151.
19. Allen, Op. Cit., p. 43.

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Willow Glen High School
Advisor: Mrs. Kathryn C. Philp