



75th Anniversary 1908 - 1983



1908-1919

The very first class at the University of Alberta was held on September 23, 1908.

That year the university of Alberta experienced an enrollment of 47 students. The Board of Governors report for that year excitedly states "no other fledgling university in Canada has ever started out with so many students."

Most of the students came from the Strathcona area and if they did not they lodged there. At that time the University of Alberta did not have a campus. Most classes were held in the Strathcona Collegiate Institute which stood at 10523-84 Ave.

While one source referred to that very first class as a "mixed bunch" this is a gross overstatement. In fact, they appeared to be very homogenous; only seven of them were women.

The women originally banded together and called themselves facetiously the S.I.S., (Society of Independent Spinsters). Later in 1911 the Wauneita Society was formed. With the motto of Payuk Uche Kukeyow, Kukeyow uche Payuk (whatever the hell that means) the Wauneitas seemed largely concerned with little else but arranging 'formal teas', 'fetes', and 'dances'.

Students in those days wore gowns to class. The Wauneitas didn't seem to like this too much and there is one example of a Wauneita Column in the Gateway (which began in 1910) complaining about this "Unnecessary imposed conformity". However men in those days seemed to prefer it as the gowns "saved ones clothes". Gowns were done away with in 1920 only to be re-instated for seniors in their graduating year in 1926.

The war years, 1914 - 1918, saw the U of A respond with close to 600 faculty members and students going off to fight in France. There was a lot of Khaki going about Edmonton in those days as more and more men were killed in the trenches of World War I.

One popular student activity in those days was debating. There was a Varsity Debating Team as well as a club. Debates were well attended and well reported on in the Gateway. It seems that debating was as popular in its own right as football.

There was also some student government in those days which was very different from the set-up we have now. The Board of Governors in 1916 actually set up a committee which would be responsible for encouraging the students to a greater and greater degree of self government. Everybody back then thought democracy was a really cool thing.

The students elected council members as well as what appeared to be an executive core.

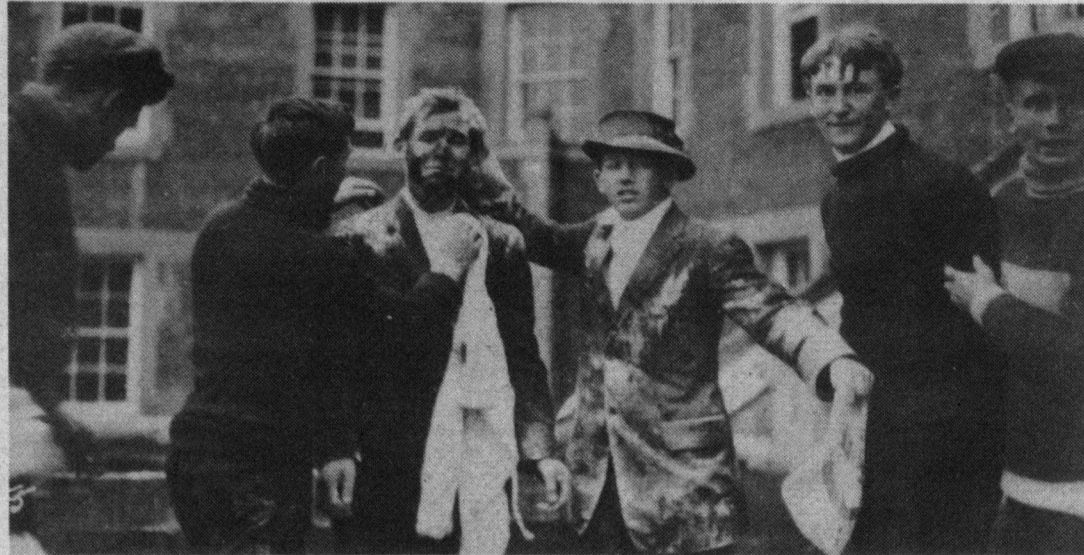
There was a president and vice president. There were also four departments with elected chairmen: The YMCA, the Athletics Society and the Literary Association.

The YMCA concerned itself with fostering Christian attitudes amongst the men of the campus, the Literary Association tried to foster an appreciation for the classics and the written word, and the Athletics Society organized the University's sports.



THE STUDENTS!

1920-1929



Above: It's all in a day's debauchery at Initiation, 1913.



Above: (1911) The first meeting of the women's club "Wauneita", formerly the Society of Independent Spinsters.

Below: Every University has one, don't they? At least they did in 1924.

The new decade saw freshmen still being initiated. For the first few years of the decade initiation even generated some controversy as the Students' Union considered doing away with it. But the practice continued although the degree of humiliation students were subjected to does appear to have decreased.

The enrollment continued to increase throughout the twenties. In 1920 900 students were enrolled at the U of A. By 1929 that figure had increased to 1361.

Debating continued to be a popular aspect of a students life. It even rivalled football in popularity (our football team's popularity that is). One debate even drew a crowd of over 400 people in 1923.

Other popular student organizations were the Rooters, who were basically cheerleaders and the Glee Club, in charge of campus glee.

Students had gotten their own government in better order too. The YMCA were gone from student politics and the official title was, by the twenties the Students' Union.

Under the banner of St. George slaying the dragon, student government had organized itself into a fairly representative council. There was even a student legal system with an elected student sheriff and elected judges, one chief justice and two puisne judges.

The Wauneitas too, had really come into their own. They had two reps in the Students' Union and had begun to seriously campaign for women's rights.

In 1929 the Wauneitas held a referendum of their membership to see if there was support for the notion of allowing Wauneitas to smoke cigarettes in the Tuck Shop. The referendum said "yes".

Unfortunately it was to serve little purpose. In those days it was illegal for women to smoke in public.

