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AM ST 304
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Extra Credit #2

Panel presentation at the Global Women's Studies Colloquium, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, March 12, 2026. "Making a Record: The BYU Women @150 Project."

The BYU Women @150 Project began with a question that appears straightforward but carries significant weight: how does a university tell its own story, and who is invited into that story?

The BYU Women @150 Project began with a question that reaches far beyond one book: how does a university decide what deserves to be remembered, and what happens when important lives have not been fully recorded? Presented at the Global Women's Studies Colloquium, the panel showed that this project is not just about publishing biographies of notable women. It is about building a stronger institutional memory. It is about identifying gaps in the historical record, returning to the archives, gathering sources, and making sure that women who helped shape BYU are no longer left in the margins of its story. What made the panel so compelling was its insistence that telling a more complete history is not optional. It is part of an institution's responsibility to understand itself honestly.

One of the clearest points the presenters made was that silence in the historical record does not mean silence in history. Faculty first recognized the need for the project when students struggled to name women who had shaped BYU's academic and institutional life. That problem did not exist because women had not contributed. It existed because too many of those contributions had not been preserved, emphasized, or taught in ways that made them visible. That distinction matters. History is never just sitting there waiting to be found in complete form. It has to be gathered, organized, interpreted, and told. Archives matter because they determine what later generations can know. When important people are missing from the archive, they are missing from the story, and when they are missing from the story, a university begins to misunderstand its own past.

The project's collaborative structure made that point even stronger. Rather than assigning the work to one author, the editors built the volume through the combined efforts of nearly one hundred contributors, including faculty, students, librarians, administrators, and community members. That kind of collective labor reflects the very argument the project is making. Institutional history is not built by one person working alone. It takes people who know how to ask good questions, search records carefully, verify sources, compare accounts, edit clearly, and shape scattered materials into something trustworthy and usable. The scale of this effort says a great deal about the seriousness of the project. This was not treated as a side project or a sentimental gesture. It was treated as work worthy of time, structure, expertise, and sustained attention.

The research process itself was one of the most impressive parts of the presentation. Much of the work happened through the Public Humanities Women's Lab course, where students moved from a vague awareness that women had been overlooked to the concrete task of finding them in the record. At the start, only a few names came easily to mind. As students worked through yearbooks, newspapers, archives, family histories, and institutional records, that number grew to more than 300 women. That shift matters because it reveals the difference between absence and invisibility. The women were there. Their work mattered. Their influence shaped the university. What was missing was not the history itself, but the institutional habit of seeing, preserving, and teaching it. The archive expanded because people took the time to look again and to look more closely.

That is one reason the project feels so valuable. It does not simply repeat what is already well known. It enlarges the historical record. The presenters explained that contributors uncovered new materials, located overlooked documents, and, in some cases, helped preserve sources that had not previously been gathered in a form that future scholars could use. That means the project is doing more than writing about history. It is actively laying the foundation

for future history writing. That kind of work has lasting value. It gives future students, teachers, and researchers more to work with. It creates a stronger base for future scholarship. It also changes what counts as evidence of contribution. The project does not limit significance to fame or public recognition. It pays attention to influence, labor, and the many forms of service and leadership that sustain a university over time, even when those forms are not always publicly celebrated.

The design of the book reflects that same balance of accessibility and rigor. The short biographies invite readers in, but they are supported by research, historical context, images, and bibliography. That combination makes the volume useful rather than merely admirable. It can be read, taught, cited, and used as a foundation for future work. It gives readers an entry point into the lives of women who shaped BYU, while also grounding those stories in evidence. That matters because memory without sources can become vague, but sources without storytelling often remain buried. The strength of this project is that it does both. It gathers the record and tells the story. It preserves evidence and gives it form. It turns scattered materials into an institutional narrative that people can actually carry forward.

The panel also made clear that the effort behind the project has been enormous. Coordinating contributors, editing entries, standardizing format, confirming sources, and organizing hundreds of biographies into a coherent volume required thousands of hours of labor. That kind of effort deserves attention because it reflects real devotion to the work. The initiators and participants did not just identify an important need. They followed through on it with discipline, patience, and scholarly care. They treated women's history at BYU as worthy of lasting, authoritative treatment. That is part of what gives the project its credibility. It was built with enough seriousness to matter long after the colloquium itself is over.

Just as important, the project is not being treated as finished once the book appears. Plans for a digital archive through BYU's Scholars Archive mean that new biographies and materials

can continue to be added over time. That future-facing model gives the project even more significance. It suggests that archiving is not a one-time act of correction, but an ongoing commitment to telling the university's story more fully. That matters because institutions change, and so do the questions people ask of the past. A living archive allows the story to keep growing. It leaves room for further discovery, additional voices, and new forms of recognition. Instead of presenting women's history as a completed appendix to BYU's past, the project places it where it belongs: inside the continuing work of documenting, interpreting, and understanding the university itself.

The BYU Women @150 Project matters because it strengthens the university's ability to remember truthfully. It reminds us that history is shaped by choices about what gets preserved, what gets emphasized, and who gets named as part of the institution's legacy. By returning to the archive, expanding the record, and telling these stories with care, the project helps BYU tell a fuller story about itself. It honors the women who built, taught, served, led, and sustained the university. It also serves the future by providing students and scholars with better sources, a stronger historical record, and a more honest understanding of the community they belong to. That is what made the panel so meaningful. It was not simply celebrating a book. It was showing why archives matter, why telling the story matters, and why the labor of remembering is one of the most important forms of institutional stewardship.

Citation

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