



L. Douglas Smoot, recipient of the 2008 Junius F. Wells Award, presented to him by the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation. Photograph by Chad Braithwaite.

The 2008 Junius F. Wells Award: A Tribute to L. Douglas Smoot

Kenneth R. Mays

On October 17, 2008, the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation held its fourth annual awards banquet, at which it presented the Junius F. Wells Award to L. Douglas Smoot. Doug was chosen as this year's recipient because of his leadership and efforts in preserving the 1891 Brigham Young Academy Building, now known as the Provo City Library at Academy Square located at Fifth North and University Avenue in Provo, Utah. The event was held in the very building Doug worked so hard to preserve.

On November 22, 1875, President Brigham Young established Brigham Young Academy in Provo. Before his death in 1877, Young provided a deed of trust to a seven-member board of trustees, whose president was Abraham O. Smoot, Doug's great-grandfather. The new academy faced staggering financial challenges for years. Particularly devastating was the loss of the academy's Lewis building. It was completely destroyed by fire on the evening of January 27, 1884.

Following the destruction of the Lewis building, students continued to meet in homes, businesses and even warehouses. A new, magnificent replacement building designed by Joseph Don Carlos Young was finally completed in 1891. This new structure was the heart of the academy and, later, the nucleus of the lower campus after Brigham Young Academy became Brigham Young University in 1903. By 1968, academic use of the lower campus, including the 1891 Academy Building, was discontinued. The building was used for other purposes until it was sold in 1975, with a legal easement placed on the building to preserve the facade.

KENNETH R. MAYS (mayskr@ldsces.org) is an instructor at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion adjacent to the University of Utah. He received his BS from the University of Utah and his MA from Brigham Young University. He is also a board member of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation.



Brigham Young Academy, ca. 1892. Photograph courtesy Brigham Young University.



The restored Brigham Young Academy, 2004. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.

Over the next two decades, heroic efforts were made by the Brigham Young Academy Foundation and other groups to reclaim the buildings of the lower campus for future use. Sadly, each of the thirteen attempts made by these various groups to save any of the buildings, ended without success.

At a point when almost all hope to save the main academy building was lost, Doug Smoot was invited to assist in the preservation of the structure.

He initially declined the invitation from the Brigham Young Academy Foundation, but something began to “work on him,” particularly thoughts of his great-grandfather, A. O. Smoot. A century before, A. O. had personally guaranteed payment that assured the financial viability of the original 1891 building, which was about to be lost forever. Moreover, Doug’s ties to BYU as a student, professor, department chair, and college dean motivated his commitment to take charge of one final campaign to save the original building.

Staggering challenges were encountered with innovative solutions. Doug and his team championed a citizens’ bond election to finance a new city library to be part of the new complex. Having passed that hurdle, they still had to raise six million dollars needed above the cost of the library. Once accomplished, the restoration became the new Provo City Library at Academy Square. Doug labored alongside other tireless workers, but it is generally acknowledged that without his leadership and drive, that historic building would have been lost.

The Junius F. Wells banquet was held in the ballroom of what was once the original 1891 Academy Building, the structure Doug and others worked so hard to preserve. The evening was an elegant affair. Attending dignitaries included Utah Lieutenant Governor Gary R. Herbert; George Q. Stuart, former Provo City Mayor; former LDS General Relief Society President, Mary Ellen W. Smoot; and former LDS Young Women General President, Janette Hales Beckham.

The event was emceed by local broadcast personality, Mark Van Wagoner. Musical numbers were sung by Mindy Robins and Michelle Hyde, both daughters of Doug and his wife, Marian. Kim R. Wilson, chairman of the



L. Douglas and Marian B. Smoot at the Junius F. Wells Award dinner. Photograph by Kenneth R. Mays.



Kim R. Wilson, Chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, presenting L. Douglas Smoot with the Junius F. Wells Award. Previous recipients of the award include LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, Karl Ricks Anderson, and M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve. Photograph by Chad Braithwaite.

Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, made some remarks concerning the purpose and nature of the Junius F. Wells Award as well as the history and service of the Foundation.

Following the dinner, a visual presentation outlining the history of the Academy Building and Doug's role in preserving the structure was shown. Included in that presentation were excerpts from an interview with Lewis K. Billings, Provo City Mayor. Also shown was a letter expressing appreciation to Doug from former LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. There were also statements of commendation read from Elders Jeffery R. Holland, Merrill K. Bateman, and Cecil O. Samuelson, each of whom served as president of Brigham Young University.

Lastly, the actual Junius F. Wells award was presented to Doug by Kim Wilson, chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, followed by remarks from L. Douglas Smoot, the guest of honor. Previous recipients include Gordon B. Hinckley, Karl Ricks Anderson, and M. Russell Ballard.