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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

# The History of the University

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# The History of the University of Bern

## 1528-1805: From the «Hohe Schule» to the Academy

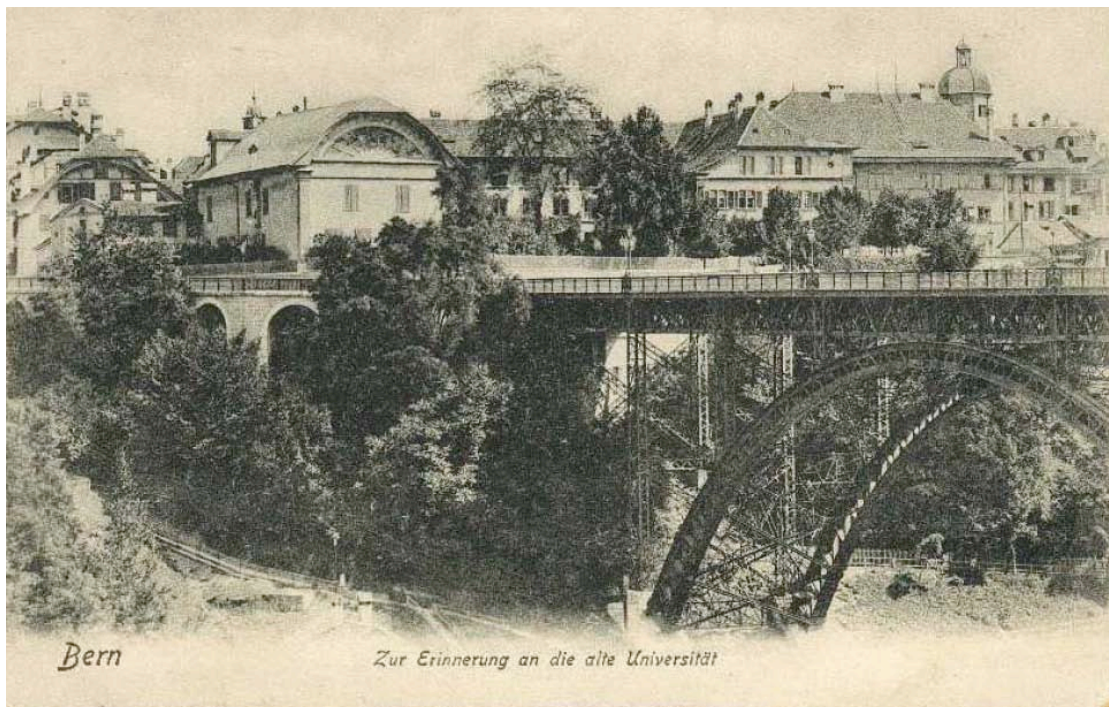
The actual foundations of the University of Bern were laid as early as the 16th century when it became necessary to assure the training of protestant ministers after the Reformation. The original number of three professors was doubled by the end of the 17th century. During the 18th century education in the humanities and divinity stayed in the foreground. With the onset of the Age of Enlightenment Chairs of Law and of Mathematics were added.

In 1805 the Bern government reorganised the entire tertiary education system by expanding the School of Theology into an Academy with four faculties. Thus not only ministers but also lawyers and physicians (including veterinarians) could complete their entire education in Bern. The Philosophical Faculty (Humanities and Natural Sciences) was to lay the foundation for the three «higher» faculties.

## 1834: Foundation of the University

In 1831, the patrician regime of Bern had to give way to the Liberals, and the new government fulfilled the need for a loyal civil service and educated elite by transforming the Academy into a University following the German model. The University Law passed in 1834 introduced academic freedom for study and instruction. The number of professors increased from 29 to 45. In the beginning entry requirements were very low in order to enable the rural population to gain access to higher education. The University of Bern was soon drawn into the great political altercations of the time. Only in the second half of the century did circumstances allow for a more serene development.

In 1885, the number of students exceeded for the first time the number of 500, and by the end of the century had risen to over 1000 mainly due to the influx of foreign students. In 1868/1870, female students from Russia helped breach the University to women. By the end of the 19th century, the Institute of Natural Sciences left the old Monastery to move into its own building, and in 1903, the new Main Building of the University on the «Grosse Schanze» could be inaugurated.



The «Hohe Schule» was located in the former Barfüsser Monastery (Ascetic Franciscan order: literally 'bare foot'), at the site of today's Casino. From 1678 to 1684, the Monastery was modified to a horseshoe-shaped building with baroque decorations.

Postcard, c. 1903: the Academy and the old University at the location of today's Casino. In the foreground the «Kirchenfeld» Bridge built in 1883.

## After 1900: New Faculties, Expansion of Institutes and Departments

After the turn of the century, the number of faculties and departments increased. The Veterinary School had separated from the University in 1868 and reunited with it in 1900 as a separate faculty. As a reaction to the papal dogma of infallibility a national catholic church, independent from Rome, was founded. Unique in Switzerland, the University of Bern established a Faculty of Independent Catholic Theology («Christkatholische Theologische Fakultät») to support this development.

In the course of the 19th century the two directions within the Faculty of Philosophy moved more and more apart, and in 1921 the formal separation between the Faculties of Philosophical History on the one hand and of Natural Sciences on the other took place. With the growing prominence of Economic Sciences, a separate department was established in 1912 within the Faculty of Law, which in 1954 was renamed Faculty of Law and Economics.



In 1903, the new Main Building of the University on the «Grosse Schanze» was inaugurated.

## After 1945: Expansion and Reorganisation

Up to the end of the Second World War, the University went through a period of quiet expansion. Its position in the economic and cultural life was widely appreciated. In the fifties and sixties of the last century demands were raised for the «development of the formative potential» and «enlargement of the academic and technical sector of education». While there were still only 250 professors (very few among them women) and 2122 students in 1956, a phase of rapid growth now began. The University also increased in space. The Humanities moved into locations outside the Main Building in order to meet their need for more room. But the rapid expansion soon led to new problems and requirements. Federal educational policies became more and more influential, and in order to better control the ever increasing complexity of the University, a revision of the University Law (modified previously in 1954) seemed vital. But a restructuring plan proposed by government-commissioned experts in 1969 was never realized, nor was a corresponding draft law that had been submitted by the University Administration.

An attempt to ratify a partial revision via referendum failed in 1982 and in 1989, when Bern counted 9000 students and 1200 professors (and still hardly any women among them), a minimally revised law was passed. Finally, with the new law of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1997 the University became its own legal entity with explicit remits set by the cantonal government.



## Early Women at the University of Bern

1868

On July 28, 1868, a «lady from Germany», Ernestine Schröer, was enrolled in the matriculation ledger of the University of Bern without the slightest difficulty. However, she never arrived in Bern and nothing is known about her identity.

1870

In 1870 Catharina Gontscharoff was the first woman to study at the «alma mater bernensis,» although she only stayed for two semesters as a guest student. She was the niece of Pushkina, the wife of the great Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin.

1872

Anna Galvis-Hotz, the daughter of the Columbian Nicanor Galvis and the Swiss Sophie Hotz, enrolled as the first regular woman student; she completed her studies in Bern, graduating in medicine in 1877. She then returned to Bogotá where she practised all her life as the first female Columbian M.D.

1872

In the autumn of 1872 the Russian Tsar issued an edict, a «ukase», barring Russian women from studying in Zürich, after which a number of Russian women arrived in Bern, i.e. Valérie von Hohenastenberg-Wigandt, Marie Walitzky, and Raissa von Swiatlowsky. Hundreds of Russian women eventually studied at the University of Bern.

1881

After the murder of Alexander II in 1881, a second wave of Russian students arrived in Central Europe. The opposition was persecuted; in recognition of the connection between education and the development of revolutionary ideas, admission regulations to Russian universities had become more restrictive. This led to an exodus from Russia of young, education-starved people, and to the so-called «tide of Russian women» arriving in Bern in the 1890s.

1874

In 1874 Rosalia Simonowitsch, a Russian student of medicine, was the first woman to graduate from the University of Bern as a medical doctor.

1888

At the end of the 19th century, the Bohemian Anna Bayer was the first woman to open a medical practice, at Kramgasse in Bern, later moving to Gerechtigkeitsgasse, also in Bern.

1889

In 1889, at last, the first Swiss woman, Hedwig Widmer-Zimmerli from Zofingen, completed her medical studies at the University of Bern with a Ph.D. The second Swiss woman to graduate from the University of Bern was Clémence Broye from Estavayer, in 1894.

1898

The first woman to graduate, in 1898, from the University of Bern as a professor was the philosopher, Anna Tumarkin. She was also the University of Bern's first female honorary (1906) and associate professor (1909). The great Sofja Kowalewskaja was the first ever woman professor, «enthroned» in Stockholm in 1884. Unlike Kowalewskaja, Tumarkin, however, was Europe's very first female member of a University Senate, and was also authorised to examine Ph.D. and professorship candidates.



Professor Anna Tumarkin

1899

The Female Students' Society was founded to represent women's interests; their pin read, «Same Rights, Same Duties.»

1914/1917

Admission to the University of Bern became more restricted; conditions improved in Russia; World War I broke out in 1914; the Russian Revolution was proclaimed in 1917, stemming the flow of Russian women coming to Bern. The number of female students at the University of Bern fell from 1500 to 500, i.e. less than 10 percent of all students.

1964

It was only in 1964 that a woman at last received a full professorship. Irene Blumenstein-Steiner, specialised in tax law, succeeded her husband two years prior to her own retirement.



Prof. Irene Blumenstein-Steiner

1967

In 1967 Professor Maria Bindschedler, full professor in Germanic Philology, became the first female Dean of the University of Bern.

1989

Professor Beatrix Mesmer-Strupp, full professor in General Modern and Swiss History, became Vice-Rector in 1989 and was thus the first woman to join the University Management. To this date, there has been no female Rector of the University of Bern.

2002

In the early 1980s, one third of the students were women. Today, some 50 percent of the 10'000 students are female. However, a mere 8 percent of the professors of the University of Bern are women.