

Happy 160th, University of Rochester

By Joel Seligman

THE FIRST UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER STUDENTS arrived on November 5, 1850, on what felt like a late summer day. As the entering class of 60 students participated in the inaugural ceremony that afternoon, the temperature had risen to 74 degrees. It was also Election Day, and newspapers reported that results from state races would arrive quickly, thanks to the new wonder of the telegraph.

This fall our University celebrates its 160th birthday. Our campus and our students—as well as the state, our community, and our nation—are profoundly different. This September we will welcome more than 5,000 undergraduates to the School of Arts and Sciences, the Hajim School of Engineering, the Eastman School, and the School of Nursing. Across all six academic units, more than 9,900 students will study in our bachelor's, master's, doctoral, residency, fellowship, and other postdoctoral programs.

In 1850, the entire entering class was white and male, and almost all of our students came from New York and New England. Today, our students come from virtually every state in the nation, and from nearly 120 countries. In our undergraduate programs, our student population is almost equally divided between men and women and gaining in diversity with underrepresented minorities and multiracial and international students making up about 30 percent of our undergraduates.

In 1850, three out of every four members of the new class planned to enter the Protestant ministry, and they and their classmates set out on a rigorously proscribed curriculum that emphasized Greek, Latin, algebra, geometry, ancient and modern history, rhetoric, natural philosophy, logic, chemistry, optics, botany, astronomy, and political economy.

Today, our undergraduates can choose from nearly 75 different majors. While they can still major in Greek and Latin, history, or astronomy, our students also can pursue a number of new majors, including biomedical engineering, public health,



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and international relations. Through our groundbreaking Rochester curriculum, our students plan their academic programs based on their intellectual interests, putting into practice the scholarly pursuit of knowledge that will serve them throughout their lives.

In 1850, the entire University was housed in one building. For \$800 a year, the University rented the United States Hotel on what was then Buffalo—and now West Main—Street. The building had been built in 1826 in the hope of attracting travelers on the newly opened Erie Canal.

Today, the University occupies more than 11 million square feet and 164 buildings. The University has grown into

a complex institution that ranks among America's premier research universities. By setting our academic, artistic, clinical, and health care missions to represent the highest quality, we have established our University as a leading comprehensive research university.

While there are many ways in which our University and our students today differ from those of 160 years ago, there are also remarkable similarities. The students of 1850 gathered in the middle of a booming metropolis known as the Flour City. Just a few buildings away from our "hotel" campus, abolitionist Frederick Douglass had established his landmark publishing enterprise, including *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. The early leaders of our University frequently met with Douglass, sharing their ideas about education and leadership. In 1900 Susan B. Anthony famously pledged her life insurance so that women students could enroll in the University.

Over the past century and a half, we have witnessed tremendous social, political, and technological change. Our University is committed to the idea that a vibrant society and economy—whether an 1850s boomtown, a 1950s manufacturing giant, or a 2010 knowledge-based economy—requires cutting-edge discovery, scholarship, and technological breakthroughs.

But in a critical respect our core values have not changed. The day before our first graduation ceremony, on July 9, 1851, Reverend Henry Ward Beecher spoke to the graduating class of 10 about "Character."

On May 16, 2010, more than 5,000 attended the College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering's graduation ceremony, where 1,328 students graduated. They heard Wegmans CEO Danny Wegman deliver a Commencement address that notably stated: "If you want to get ahead yourself, think of others. If you want to get credit yourself, give credit to others. If you want to be the best at something, be humble." Implicit in his words was a value that has animated this University throughout our entire history—a concern for our community and its well-being. The more things change, the more they stay the same. 