

# Ask the Archivist: Was that Eleanor Roosevelt?

*A question for Melissa Mead, the John M. and Barbara Keil University Archivist and Rochester Collections Librarian.*



**I have a memory—very indistinct—that I saw Eleanor Roosevelt in Rochester when I was growing up there, most likely between 1947 and 1952 (for me, between seventh grade and the end of high school). My best recollection was that she was speaking, on stage, probably at the Eastman Theatre. I had many reasons to attend such an event: I was a standard bearer, had some teachers with an interest in the U.N. And it was probably before I was an undergraduate at the U of R or on the faculty in the early 1960s. I would greatly appreciate if you could identify this event (or even say it never happened).—Robert Maples '56**

Swami Nikhilananda (member from India in the East-West Philosophers' Conference in Honolulu in 1949), Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith (U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1946–49), Edwin Nourse (former chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers), and Paul Gore-Booth (head of British Information Services in the United States).

According to records for the conference, Roosevelt arrived in Rochester at 8 a.m. via the New York Central train, and was taken to the home of Joseph and Marie Wilson. Joe Wilson '31 was at this time president of the Haloid Company (later Xerox Corporation), had recently joined the University's Board of Trustees, and was hosting her in his capacity as president of the City Club.

Following breakfast with the Wilsons, Roosevelt went to Strong Auditorium on the River Campus, where the theme of the morning session was "Social Rights and Obligations," and she and Bunche spoke on their roles with the United Nations.

Skipping the conference luncheon in Todd Union, the two went to the Chamber of Commerce to another "Lincoln Day" event. (This was at a time when the birthdays of Lincoln and Washington were not celebrated jointly as "Presidents' Day.") A *Democrat and Chronicle* article reports that poet and Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg addressed a capacity crowd on the topic "What Would Lincoln Do

Today?" As part of the proceedings, the Rochester chapter of the NAACP honored Bunche—who later the same year would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize—with the establishment of a scholarship in his name for African-American Rochester city high school students to attend the University. The Rochester NAACP chapter has had notable leadership from the University, including English professor John Rothwell Slater and history professor Richard Wade.

A special edition of the *Campus-Times* promoted the events of the conference—the issue was jointly produced by the College for Men and the College for Women, and the masthead presages the merger of the campuses and their newspapers (the *Campus* and the *Tower Times*) by five years.



**ROCHESTER HOSTS:** Joe Wilson '31, and his wife, Marie (Peggy) Wilson (center), served as the hosts for Eleanor Roosevelt when she visited Rochester for a University conference and other presentations in 1950.

Eleanor Roosevelt was indeed in Rochester, and spoke at Eastman Theatre on Saturday evening, February 11, 1950. It is likely you saw her there at an event sponsored by the City Club of Rochester, entitled "The Meaning of Lincoln." Roosevelt was appointed by President Harry Truman as the first U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. She shared the stage with Ralph Bunche, at the time serving as the United Nations mediator for Palestine.

But it was not the only opportunity to hear them speak that day. Roosevelt and Bunche were invited to participate in the first big event of the University's centennial celebration: the two-day Students' Conference on Human Rights.

The first day's schedule featured speeches by

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