Martin Luther King Jr. once said “We are not makers of history. We are made by history.” In this time of change for Northern Illinois University we want to take a moment to look back at where we have been before we take that next step into our bold future. This is not a comprehensive look at our 114 and counting years of higher education, as surely no one exhibition could adequately convey the growth of our university through 11 decades.

Instead, we endeavored to give a brief retrospective of our great university. We wanted to share some of our past that you may not realize existed; to show you our campus when it was young and note the changes to its literal and figurative landscape; to prove that some of our great programs and traditions like “Student Career Services” and “Community Service” were not just formed in the past few years to meet the needs of the now.

With these images, we hope to remind you of and reconnect you to our past as we prepare to take bold steps forward. As you walk in the exhibit, remember the words of Dr. King. We have been made by the history created before us. And we challenge you to help us make a bold future for generations of Huskies to come.

Northern Illinois University

Learning Today,
Leading Tomorrow
When looking for a home for the new Northern Illinois State Normal School, DeKalb was not the only location being considered. Rockford, Oregon and Polo were among the competing locations. In 1895, the committee for the new school was faced with 53 acres of donated land from the homestead of Joseph Gildon. The first building, known today as Abeggel Hall, was also the only building for the college for quite some time. The “Castle on a Hill” as it was nicknamed, served as the “classroom and boardroom, library and gymnasium, administrative office building and lecture hall.”

The first landmark to join Abeggel Hall on campus was the Freshman Beach which was erected in 1909. Since then the campus has grown to 756 acres with 64 major buildings.
Appointed by the Board of Trustees, the president of Northern Illinois University serves as the chief executive officer of the institution and leads the university in all functions. John William Cook was not only the first president (for the then Northern Illinois State Normal School) but was also the longest serving president, having led NIU for 20 years. In July of 2013, Douglas D. Baker was named the university’s 12th chief executive officer. Soon after, he announced his four “pillars” for strategic priorities: Student Career Success, Thriving Communities, NIU Financial and Program Viability, and Ethically Inspired Leadership.
Northern Illinois State Normal School was chartered in 1895 and offered its first classes in 1899. It would see two more name changes (Northern Illinois State Teachers College – 1921, Northern Illinois State College – 1951) before becoming Northern Illinois University in 1957.

From the beginning NIU was an institution that set out to educate the teachers of Illinois. The Colleges of Education and Liberal Arts and Sciences as they are today were formally established in 1959. The College of Business joined two years later in 1961. Today’s College of Visual and Performing Arts grew out of a reorganization of the College of Fine and Applied Arts in 1973. Music, Fine Arts and Theatre Arts became the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

The College of Business was established in 1959. The College of Health and Human Sciences was established in 1995. The College of Arts and Sciences was established in 1961. The College of Engineering and Engineering Technology was established in 1975. The College of Education and Human Development was established in 1981.

Students at NIU can choose from 55 undergraduate majors, 75 minors, 89 emphases, and 8 preprofessional programs. More than 100 graduate programs are offered by the university.

NIU offers a wide range of degrees and programs, including undergraduate, graduate, professional, and continuing education options. The university is committed to providing a quality education to prepare students for successful careers and lifelong learning. NIU is dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, and service to the community.
When Northern Illinois University first opened as Northern Illinois State Normal School, the administration felt the students needed more than just classroom instruction to help ensure success in their careers. To that end, President John Williston Cook established the Ellwood and Glidden Societies—the first student organizations—which divided the student body in two by last name (alphabetically) and encouraged competitions in a wide range of activities from music and theater to debates and oratory. This began NIU's history of providing engagement opportunities for students beyond the classroom in the form of student organizations. Since that time the range and scope of the organizations and programs on campus have been as diverse as our student population, growing in sophistication along with our student body. Today, programs such as the Dr. Davis CHANCE program, the USDA AR program, and Research Backpack programs are aimed at expanding students' experiences throughout their education.
Athletics has been a part of Northern Illinois University since its beginning. The first NIU football game resulted in a 16–6 victory over Dekalb High School in 1899. The Women’s Basketball team, led by NIU’s first coach, Paul Lesueur Charles, competed in 1902 even though the sport itself was only a few years old. The cardinal and black, chief Huskies of today have seen quite a few changes, including colors! The school colors were originally yellow and white. Northern Illinois students cheered mightily in the stands for the Protos, Cardinals, Vikingsmen, Noisemakers, and Teichem before officially becoming the NIU Huskies on January 25, 1940. The new name was announced in the Northern Illinois, now known as the Northern Star. In fact in that same article, George G. “Chuck” Evans made reference to a Huskie dog (not H.U.S.K.Y dog), and thus the singular form of Huskies became Huskies.
The range of visiting celebrities, guest speakers and dignitaries that have come to visit Northern Illinois University is as diverse as the students who attend classes here. Teddy Roosevelt spoke to 20,000 people in the Montgomery Auditorium (the wooded lot where the Psychology-Computer Science building now stands) in 1900 as part of a Republican rally. Another famous Roosevelt, Eleanor, came to campus in 1969. Bill Cosby, whose first visit to campus came in the '70s, returned in 2002 to help the community celebrate the opening of the Convocation Center. The list of visitors includes notable His Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand visited campus in September of 2013 to receive an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters.
The so-called "town and gown" relationship between Northern Illinois University and the communities of DeKalb and Sycamore is as old as the school itself. Built on 65 acres of land donated by a DeKalb resident, the ties that bind our university and community are unbreakable. As NIU's first students began learning theory in education, they practiced their skills in DeKalb and Sycamore schools. On-site experiences are commonplace in today's world, but in the early 1900s the practice was not only admired but embraced as mutually beneficial. Over the decades the "town and gown" relationship has continued to develop, and as early as 1974, the term "Communiversity" was used to express the cooperation and unity displayed by NIU and its neighbors. In challenging times no one ever stood alone. Before a hand was even extended seeking help another was already being extended back to show support. As we strive to strengthen our communities, we can build on the foundation of the rich and historic relationship NIU has enjoyed with the local area.
Northern Illinois University’s reach extends well beyond the border of DeKalb County. Our first extension campus, De Lavaux-Tihi Field Campus, opened in 1994 in Oregon, Illinois, to offer outdoor education to our students. Additional outreach campuses would later be built in Hoffman Estates (1992), Rockford (1995) and Poplar Grove (2005) to provide better access to higher education throughout our region.

Reaching further beyond our county’s borders, NIU has long been host to many international students. In 1998 the University welcomed six men from the Philippines as our first international students. The Division of International Programs which included Foreign Studies commenced operations on September 1, 1969 offering programs to NIU students in England, France, Denmark and Austria. Now known as the Study Abroad office, students can pursue career success in 75 different countries.

Thanks to recent advances in technology, NIU students and faculty can now collaborate with other faculty and students all over the world. In April 2007 NIU Faculty member Greg Berger, together with a musician from San Francisco, provided near-real-time musical accompaniment, each from their own remote location, for a two-person performance at the University of Alaska – Fairbanks, via Internet.

Whether hosting international students, participating in study abroad, or through state of the art technologies, NIU has always encouraged our students to engage in the communities (locally, regionally, and globally) in which they live.