

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Todd Union

other names/site number N/A

name of related multiple property listing N/A

## Location

street & number 415 Alumni Road

N/A

not for publication

city or town Rochester

N/A

vicinity

state New York code NY county Monroe code 055 zip code 14627

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide X local

2 Daniel  
Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

3/9/2023

DS4 PD  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

    entered in the National Register

    determined eligible for the National Register

    determined not eligible for the National Register

    removed from the National Register

    other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/college

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/college

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/

Georgian Revival

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: BRICK

walls: BRICK, LIMESTONE, STONE

roof: SLATE

other:

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**Summary Paragraph**

Todd Union is a Georgian Revival style building located on the University of Rochester's River Campus in Rochester, Monroe County, New York. The building is located at the southern end of the Fraternity Quadrangle at the northwest edge of the campus, near a sharp bend in the Genesee River. Constructed in 1930 and named after George W. Todd who championed the campaign for the new campus and a student union, the building housed student activities, dining facilities, and other student amenities. Todd Union is a two and one-half story brick building with marble and limestone detailing. Exterior features include a symmetrical form, round-arched transoms over entrances, a projecting five-bay center section with a hipped roof with dormers, a recessed portico with full-height piers between tall, paired windows, a pronounced limestone water table and frieze band, and decorative lintels over evenly spaced windows. The interior retains original features, such as historic staircases, doors, fireplaces, wainscoting, window and door trim, and the post office boxes in the basement. The use of the building is now for meeting and performance space. The building was designed by a well-known Rochester firm (Gordon and Kaelber), which designed many of the original buildings on the River Campus. The building is considered a contributing building within the University of Rochester's Riverside Campus, which has been determined eligible for National Register listing; however, it is being nominated individually for its significance under Criterion A in the area of Social History/LGBT. As such, the period of significance begins in 1970, with the first meeting of the Gay Liberation Front in Todd Union, and ends in 1976, when the organization moved to another building on campus. The boundary has been drawn to include the building and its immediate setting, which is defined by the sidewalks surrounding the building. This sets the building off from adjacent roads and buildings and defines an immediate setting marked by grass and decorative plantings.

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**Narrative Description**

**Location and Setting**

Todd Union is a two-and-one-half story building with a raised basement level, located on the River Campus of the University of Rochester, which is sited along the east side of the Genesee River south of downtown Rochester, Monroe County, New York. [See Figure 7.1.] The University of Rochester River Campus sits almost entirely between Mt. Hope Cemetery (National Register listed 2018) to the east and the Genesee River to the west, with the UR Medicine Strong Memorial Hospital campus located to the south across Elmwood Avenue.

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The building sits prominently at the southern end of Fraternity Quadrangle at the northwest corner of campus, overlooking nine fraternal houses that were built between 1931 and 1961. To the east of the building is LaChase Hall (2011-2013) and Lattimore Hall (1930). The rear of the building faces southeast toward Strong Auditorium (1930), which itself is located at the northwest end of the Eastman Quadrangle, notably capped at the east end by Rush Rhees Library (1930). Todd Union fronts Alumni Road, which runs east-west between Wilson Boulevard and Fraternity Road to the east. Todd Union has been a key building on the UR River Campus since its construction in 1930. It serves as a hub of student activities and retains a high degree of integrity.

**Exterior Description**

Todd Union is a two-and-one-half story building with a raised basement, built in the Georgian Revival style popular among collegiate architecture of the early twentieth century. The building is constructed of red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern with a random distribution of headers and stretchers and limestone trim. The mainly symmetrical building has a black slate roof, a three-part plan with a deep wing extending to the west toward the Genesee River and a shallower wing extending east toward LeChase Hall. The central block projects forward one bay and is slightly taller than the two flanking pavilions. Each of the sections has a hipped roof, and the center block is defined by stepped parapets on each end, each featuring two large chimneys. Each of the smaller pavilions has a large interior end chimney on its outer wall. The original roof balustrade on the central block has been removed. The building has two matching entrances located in the east and west bays of the central block, which are accessed by a flight of five granite steps capped with unadorned low granite walls. A stone banding wraps the building beneath the roofline with dentil trim wrapping the central block.

The north façade of the central block features a two-story inset limestone portico with four large, square Doric columns supporting an entablature inscribed "GEORGE W TODD UNION." The first story of the portico features three evenly spaced ten-light French doors with four-light transoms above each section. Spanning between each of the columns is a painted wrought-iron balustrade. The raised basement beneath this section is flush with the front of the portico and features paired six-over-six double-hung windows separated by wide limestone mullions centered in each of the portico bays. The second story of the portico features three evenly spaced twelve-light French doors that open to shallow balconettes meant only for ornamentation. The two arched entrance openings flank either side of the portico and enter the building between the basement and first floor. The openings include two-part paneled Doric limestone pilasters, a simple entablature spanning the opening with a carved wreath at each end and egg and dart trim detailing. Above the entablatures are six-paneled limestone arches surrounding a fanlight transom. The arched portion of the openings includes an arched

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brick stretcher lintel detail. A lantern style light fixture is affixed to the façade on either side of the entrance openings. The east entrance entablature is inscribed, “A UNION FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND MORE ABUNDANT COLLEGE LIFE,” while the west entrance entablature is inscribed, “MEETING HERE ON COMMON GROUND, MANY WILL FIND ENDURING LOYALTIES.” Above each of the entrances is a six-over-nine double-hung wood window with simple ornamental limestone lintel and keystone. There are three evenly spaced, hipped roof dormers over the center portico, each with a six-over-six double-hung wood window and slate roofing.

The front elevation of the east wing features paired six-over-six double-hung replacement windows beneath a limestone water table at the basement level, three evenly spaced twelve-over-twelve double-hung wood windows with simple limestone sills and stepped lintels at the first-story, and three evenly spaced six-over-six double-hung wood windows with simple limestone sills and lintels with keystones. The west wing features six-over-six double-hung windows beneath a limestone water table at the basement level, and three large evenly spaced twenty-over-twenty-over-twenty triple-hung wood windows that open into a two-story space. These windows have simple limestone sills and stepped lintels.

The east elevation features marble panels along the foundation and paired six-over-six double-hung replacement windows beneath the water table. The first and second stories include three evenly spaced double-hung wood windows matching the configuration and detailing of their counterparts on the front. A large brick chimney rises from the center of the elevation with a stone cap. Behind the east wing is a one-story, basement level extension. Its roof serves as a terrace that is level with the first-story. Windows along this portion of the basement were replaced to match the other windows found on the east wing. The water table wraps around this section of the building. The exposed portion of the east elevation of the central block features twelve-over-twelve double-hung wood windows that match the other first-floor windows, with one having ten-light French doors with four-light transoms above. Second-story windows are six-over-six double-hung wood, and a small, wood paneled opening sits just above the second story. A multi-light arched window sits in the gable end of the elevation between two large brick masonry chimneys with stone caps.

Todd Union’s west elevation features paired six-over-six double-hung historic wood and replacement windows beneath the water table. Some of the upper sash are covered with a plywood panels, allowing for ventilation tubs. The upper level of the west wing’s west elevation includes four triple-hung wood windows that match the configuration and detailing found on the façade, with the southernmost opening converted for egress, retaining

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the upper sash. Two large brick chimneys extend from the building in the second and sixth bays. The west elevation of the central block is less exposed than on the east elevation due to the deeper bay but features two brick chimneys with stone caps to match the east elevation. Typical details of the Georgian Revival style are the east and west elevation parapets and paired end chimneys.

At the rear (south elevation) of the building, a section extending from the central block includes only the basement and first-story levels with a shallow, second-story mechanical enclosure at the center of the elevation. First-story windows of this section are eight-over-twelve double-hung wood with stepped limestone lintels. Second-story windows on the main block are six-over-six double-hung sash to match the front and east elevations. A large, three-flue brick chimney rises from the center of the main block rear elevation and is flanked by hipped roof dormers with six-over-six double-hung wood windows. The south elevation of the west wing features two twenty-over-twenty double-hung wood windows with stepped lintels. A one-story addition extends to the south of the west wing and has stepped parapets with stone caps. The addition was constructed of Flemish bond red brick to match the main building. Each opening includes a six-light wood casement window, some covered or replaced by plywood panels. A large metal door is located on the south elevation of the addition, and a metal door is on the east elevation. The stone water table does not extend around this addition.

The basement level rises approximately a one-half story above grade at the front and side elevations, with a lesser rise in the rear elevation. This lower level is composed of the central block, east wing, west wing, and includes an original, rectangular extension to the southeast, which is not found on the first or second floors. There is also a small, shed-roofed extension off of the west wing to the rear (south), which houses some mechanical and storage areas.

**Interior Description** [Figures 7.3 & 7.4]

The front entry doors lead into a small rectangular vestibule with plaster walls, marble panel wainscoting, terrazzo floors, and paired glass and wood doors with rectangular leaded-glass transoms above. The interior doors open to the switchback stair landing between the basement and first floor. A set of steps leads down to the basement level, while another short run of steps leads to the first story and continues to the second floor. The lower stair treads are granite, matching the exterior entrance steps, while the rest of the treads leading to the upper floors are marble. Stair risers are painted metal, with several showing extensive paint loss and rust. This deterioration is found mainly closer to the entrance doors. The stairways have a painted wrought-iron railing with simple twisted balusters, wood handrail, and lower paneled bases on the newel posts.

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The staircases, originally open to each floor, are now enclosed with drywall, likely to meet modern fire codes. At the ground level, both main staircases lead to a drywall partition with fireproof metal door that opens into the central corridor. This corridor accesses the mail room and mailboxes, storage rooms, restrooms, and a bank. This space features terrazzo flooring, plaster walls and ceiling, and lowered bays where structural beams span the building (Photos 0013 & 0014). The southern elevation of this corridor is adorned with decorative wood panels and openings that compose the exterior of the mailroom. Metal mailbox bays are inset within some of the wood panels toward the center of the corridor and the openings have historic wood counters and metal rollup doors. Non-historic fluorescent light fixtures hang from the center of the corridor ceiling.

The northwest space in the west wing is enclosed by glass walls and houses a bank branch. The rest of the west wing was altered with new drywall partitions used to hold additional student mailboxes and a few storage rooms along the west side of the building. The lower east wing houses the campus radio station. This space is divided into small offices, storage, and studio by drywall partitions, wood doors, simple door casings and trim, VCT tiles, terrazzo, and concrete floors, fluorescent lighting, and lowered ceiling panel grids. The exterior walls are brick masonry with curved brick detailing around the window openings. Several flooring materials are found throughout the basement level, including terrazzo in the corridor, brick in portions of the rear mailroom areas, concrete throughout the radio station, and tile in the mailroom and storage areas where a kitchen and cafeteria were originally located.

**First Floor**

The first floor of the building is raised approximately one-half story above grade at the façade and is composed of a central block, east wing, and west wing, which extends to align with the rear elevation of the main block. In the 1930s, this floor included a student lounge, kitchen, and kitchen offices in the central block, small lobby and offices in the east wing, and the formal dining hall in the west wing. [See Figure 7.2] On the first story, the eastern staircase opens to a small lobby space with access into the east wing theater/dance studio and ticket booth window, and the main lounge in the central block of the building. Originally, there was a large opening between the lobby space and lounge, which has been enclosed with drywall and double slab metal doors. This new wall is inset within the former opening, revealing the original dark stained wood trim.

The lounge and former dining room in the west wing are now separated by the installation of a drywall partition. The location of the original openings connecting these spaces are still visible as the drywall has been

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infilled between three square, paneled columns along the lounge's west wall. The east wing space has non-historic wood flooring, plaster walls and ceiling, and radiators with simple covers under each of the windows. The historic square columns at the center of the room are encased with drywall. The lounge features non-historic carpet over the wood flooring, plaster walls, and drywall partitions in the former openings, square wood Doric columns and pilasters, and a large fireplace with a wood and marble surround with an inset wood dedication panel above reading:

THIS RIVER CAMPUS WITH THE BUILDINGS ERECTED THEREON FOR THE COLLEGE FOR MEN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER IS THE REALIZATION OF A DREAM OF GEORGE W TODD WHO FIRST PROPOSED THE SITE AND THEN ORGANIZED THE GROUP OF CITIZENS WHICH PROCURED THE FUNDS TO MAKE HIS DREAM A REALITY. IN RECOGNITION OF MR TODD'S GREAT SERVICE TO THE UNIVERSITY THIS BUILDING IS NAMED IN HIS HONOR.

The space is also defined by a decorative wood coffered ceiling, which is also part of the structural support of the building, a chandelier hanging from the center of the ceiling, and three evenly spaced multi-light French doors that lead out to the balcony of the exterior two-story porch. Wood wainscoting and a chair rail span the original walls of the space. Although the lounge has been enclosed, its former connectivity with the adjacent space is evident and could be reopened to its original configuration in the future.

The west wing retains its two-story plaster walls, and decorative wood paneling and radiator covers wrapping the room beneath the windowsills. The historic wood flooring is covered by vinyl sheet material and the ceiling is partially obscured by the installation of metal trelliswork. The purpose of the metal framing is to attach lighting and other props for theater shows. The entire space is painted black, including the walls, ceiling, and trim, and blackout curtains are installed at each of the large windows. The space also retains two original fireplaces at each end of the room with their intact decorative wood carved surrounds and mantels. The brick firebox also remains intact. At the rear of the space, one of the original windows is painted black, including the glass, while the other was altered for the installation of a door into the rear storage addition. All original door and window openings are visible but are infilled or altered.

To the rear of the lounge was where the former kitchen was located; it is a large room currently used as backstage prep for productions and functions, with adjacent smaller storage rooms. The larger room features south and west concrete block partition walls, while the north and east walls are brick. The ceilings in these spaces are plaster and flooring materials are carpet over the historic red quarry tile in the large space and VCT tile over various tile, cement, and linoleum in the smaller rooms. A narrow hallway leading from the lounge to



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the rear staircase and elevator retains historic half-light doors, some with six-light awning transoms above. A cased opening at the center of the hallway has an eight-light awning transom. Most of the walls in this hallway are plaster, while the rear portions are brick masonry. The flooring is non-historic VCT tile.

**Second Floor**

The second floor is composed of a central block and east wing, while the west wing is part of the double-height formal dining room on the first floor. In the 1930s, this floor included offices for student activities, a game room, and restrooms. The rooms located in the center block are raised approximately five steps higher than the east wing, with the eastern staircase aligning with the floor level in the east wing and the western staircase aligning with the floor level of the main block. The second floor has seen little alteration other than the former game room being divided down the center by a drywall partition to create two classrooms and the two nooks to either side at the rear have been enclosed to create smaller offices. These changes took place sometime in the 1950s-1960s. Room 202D (photo 0017) became the office of the Gay Liberation Front in 1970. Room 202D is a small, rectangular office located on the second floor, rear of the building, within the center block. It is ordinary in nature, similar to other buildings on this floor, without distinguishing finishes and trim. Glass and wood paneled doors with thick trim and three-light awning transoms remain throughout this upper floor.

Two original smooth square Doric columns from the open billiard room space are still evident within the mid-twentieth century layout changes, with a portion of these columns revealed outside of the drywall partition. Offices along the front (north) side of the building have French doors that lead to exterior decorative balconies. Former openings between some of the office spaces are infilled with drywall but have kept the historic wood trim visible. Carpet covers the original mastic tile floor in the corridor, billiard room, and restrooms. The ceilings and walls are primarily plaster, except for a few drywall partitions that were installed during mid-twentieth century renovations. The east wing is separated from the main block by two non-historic glass and wood doors and a drywall partition. Metal fire doors lead into the stairwells.

**Integrity**

Overall, the interior retains a high level of integrity, even though the building has been renovated several times beginning in the mid-to-late twentieth century. The exterior of the building retains its original character and materials with the exception of wood replacement double-hung windows at the raised basement level of each elevation and rear southeast section of the building. The alteration of a former triple hung window on the west

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elevation retains the upper twenty-light wood sash but has a metal exit door instead of the middle and lower sash. Room 202D, the former office of the GLF, remains similar in appearance to the time of the GLF occupancy.

The main changes to the building took place in the 1950s and the 1970s. In 1955, the Men's Dining Hall (Douglass Commons) was constructed, and Todd Union was no longer used for dining facilities. Around this time, the basement level dining and kitchen areas were repurposed as a mail center. On the first floor, the formal dining hall in the west wing was turned into an event space. In 1976, Wilson Commons was built as the new student union and Todd Union's interior spaces were once again adapted to new uses. Today, the building houses the mailroom, campus radio station, banking center, theater/event space, the historic lounge, a dance/performance space, and offices. The changes Todd Union has undergone have been sensitive to the historic building in terms of its original layout and materials that are in most instances either intact or visible and many changes are reversible .

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social History/LGTB

**Period of Significance**

1970-1976

**Significant Dates**

1970, 1973, 1976

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Gordon & Kaelber

**Period of Significance (justification)** The period of significance begins on October 3, 1970, when the Gay Liberation Front first met in Todd Union, and extends until 1976, when the organization moved to another location.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)** Although the period of significance extends very slightly into the less than fifty year period, the entire period of significance for the building encompasses only a six-year period, the significance of which has been more than adequately addressed. It would be impractical either to cut the period off at 1973, documenting only half of the GLF's period in the building, or to document the last three years as exceptionally significant, creating a false hierarchy. Therefore, it is proposed that it be listed with the stated period without the criterion G exception.

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Todd Union is significant under Criterion A in social history/LGBT for its early and significant association with the University of Rochester's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the critical role the organization played in advancing of the movement for liberation that resulted in civil rights for lesbian and gay people on campus, in the city of Rochester, and in the surrounding area. The Gay Liberation Front was one of several radical groups established in the months after the June 1969 raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. These groups promoted a new and more militant type of activism known as gay liberation, which sought to counter the secrecy and shame associated with being gay by encouraging homosexuals to come out and live openly as gay people in society. It was the radical and confrontational nature of the gay liberation movement that later energized the drive to demand equality and civil rights under the law. The University of Rochester's GLF was established at an organizational meeting held on October 3, 1970, in Todd Union, the university's student center. After an initial turnout of about 100 people, the group set up an office in Todd Union, Room 202-D. Here with funding from the Student Activities Office, it began initial efforts in advocacy and education on gay and lesbian issues. The GLF was "an association of people studying the nature of gay oppression and the potential for liberation" and comprised students and non-students, referred to as "townies."<sup>1</sup> The UR's GLF was the third campus chapter of the Gay Liberation Front established in New York, following two chapters of the Student Homophile League that were formed at NYU (fall 1968) and Cornell (May 1968), both of which were renamed Gay Liberation Fronts in September 1970 and December 1970, respectively. While the UR GLF lasted less than a decade, numerous other gay-focused organizations grew from the original campus group.<sup>2</sup> Many individuals in Rochester's LGBTQ+ community today view the early work of the GLF and its members as the catalyst that sparked the local LGBTQ+ movement, calling the original GLF members "pioneers."<sup>3</sup> The period of significance recognizes the years in which the group met in Todd Union.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Empty Closet*, January 1971, 1st edition, pg.1. <https://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/EmptyCloset>.

<sup>2</sup> Note on terminology . After consultation with members of the LGBTQ+ community and Col Raimond, LGBTQ Coordinator at UR's Paul J. Burgett Intercultural Center, it was determined the term LGBTQ+ is considered by the Intercultural Center to be most inclusive of all members of the LGBTQ+ community. This term has been used in all references to the current community. However, it was not used in the time period documented here and the use of terms such as "gay movement," "gay," and "lesbian" throughout this nomination correlate with the historic terminology used at the time the UR Gay Liberation Front was established. The authors acknowledge that as progress is made, additional terms and definitions should be recognized.

<sup>3</sup> Karen McCally, "Forty Years Out," *Rochester Review*, July-August 2013, 32.

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## **History of the University of Rochester**

The University of Rochester grew from multiple different locations that included the United States Hotel in downtown Rochester (212-224 W. Main Street), the Prince Street Campus, and the River Campus, where it remains today. [See Figure 8.1.] The first campus was established when the Baptists of Western New York were discussing the relocation of Madison University in the 1840s, originally located in Hamilton, New York, to a more suitable location. The university wanted to move to a more populated area that would provide students with more opportunities. Rochester was chosen for its rich agricultural economy, as well as its convenience in location for both the east and west regions of New York. In January 1850, a provisional charter was granted which permitted the establishment of the University of Rochester, conditional on raising \$130,000. The Trustee Board of the University of Rochester leased the former United States Hotel building on Buffalo Street, now West Main Street, to be used by the college.

In 1853, the university received eight acres of land and purchased another sixteen acres from prominent railroad contractor Azariah Boody for a new campus bounded by University Avenue, Prince Street, College Avenue, and North Goodman Street. In 1861, the university moved into the newly opened Anderson Hall on Prince Street to accommodate a growing student population. The construction of this building was followed by several other buildings on campus which were built between 1861 and 1939. The university opened its doors to women in 1900 due to efforts of those in Rochester advocating for higher female educational opportunities. By 1912, the university had a College for Men and a College for Women and at this time, Aristine Pixley Munn, mother of president of the UR Trustees Dr. John P. Munn, donated additional land to the university for the Women's College. The Prince Street Campus housed the university from 1861 until 1930 and remained the location of the Women's College until 1955, when the Women's College was moved to the River Campus. Also associated with the University of Rochester was the Eastman School of Music, originally established as the Dossenbach-Klingenberg School of Music in 1913. George Eastman, an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and founder of the Eastman Kodak Company, bought the school in 1918 and sold it to the University of Rochester for \$1.00 in June 1919.

In 1922, the University of Rochester purchased land near Mount Hope and Elmwood Avenues and opened the Medical Center Campus. The City of Rochester bought twenty-six acres of this land from the university for a new Municipal Hospital (Rochester Memorial Hospital). In 1963, the city sold the Rochester Memorial

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Hospital's X and Y Wings and the associated twenty-four-acre parcel to the university for the same price they paid in 1923. At present, the hospital building sits at the east end of the medical center and research buildings are located on the west end of the property.

At the same time, the University of Rochester was looking to relocate the campus to be closer to the medical center, there was a move to allow for a larger campus to accommodate the increasing number of students, which increased demands for student housing, amenities, and classrooms. After considering multiple locations, the university, led by prominent Rochester businessman George W. Todd, struck an agreement with the Oak Hill Country Club to purchase the club's property along the Genesee River. As part of the deal, the university agreed to buy land for the club in Pittsford and pay some of its initial construction costs. Todd, who co-founded the Todd Protectograph Company in Rochester with his brother, Libanus, also created the Greater University Campaign in 1924, which raised over \$10,000,000 to rebuild the university, of which George Eastman donated \$2,500,000. On March 1, 1926, the University of Rochester took possession of the former Oak Hill Country Club site, just north of the medical center between Mount Hope Cemetery and the Genesee River. University architects worked alongside prominent Rochester architects Edwin S. Gordon and William Kaelber, as well as landscape architects Charles Platt and the Olmsted Brothers to draw up plans for the new university campus, and construction began on the new campus in May 1927. The newly established River Campus was conveniently located only two and one-half miles from Rochester's downtown business center and near trolley and bus lines.<sup>4</sup> As the University of Rochester grew in academic offerings and student population, the campus continually expanded with the construction of new buildings to meet the ever-changing needs of modern education, extracurricular activities, and community use. Today, the University of Rochester is recognized as an American tier-one research university.

**Todd Union**

The establishment of a student union was a priority for those envisioning a new campus. The building committee studied existing student unions and visited many to get ideas for Rochester's campus. In 1928, President Rush Rhees coordinated a committee of faculty, students, and alumni to discuss the building of a campus center and formulate a constitution and by-laws. On November 25, 1929, a unanimous vote confirmed

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the plans for the student union, and ground was broken in the spring of 1930. The building was completed by September of the following school year and was strategically sited at the head of the Fraternity Quadrangle. The University of Rochester joined the ranks as one of the first universities in the country with a building dedicated as a center for campus life. When the building was constructed, there were only approximately thirty-six other colleges in the United States that had a campus club, more commonly known as a student union.<sup>5</sup> The building was named George W. Todd Union, after the chair of the Greater Rochester Campaign who had been the leader at the forefront of securing funding for such a building and the entire River Campus.

Soon referred to as Todd Union, the building housed dining, social events, shopping, barber, game, and club facilities for the students. The purpose of the student union was to create a balance between classroom education and extracurricular activities, relaxation, fellowship with other students, and to further individual talents. While the academic buildings accommodated the more serious side of a student's university experience, the student union was meant to be a central axis for college life outside the classroom for the student's time at the River Campus. Todd Union quickly became the center of campus life and a hub for student activities. Clubs had offices throughout the building and students had access to many resources throughout the student union. The bottom floor housed the mail room, while the first floor had a lounge and a recreation room.

Todd Union had a myriad of events annually, including dances, guest speakers, and discussions. The student union also provided a place for students and faculty to communicate and form connections outside the classroom, as well as student and alumni connections. The alumni headquarters and meetings were held in Todd Union and welcomed current students. The inscription above one of the entrance doors read "MEETING HERE ON COMMON GROUND, MANY WILL FIND ENDURING LOYALTIES" showing the importance of networking within the building. Students were encouraged to purchase a membership to the student union for \$5 a semester. The building originally operated by a board of managers, which consisted of six students, two faculty members, two alumni, and two university administrators. The president of the board was to always be a student. Multiple committees reported to the board and were also primarily student led. The operations of the building were maintained by students and all decisions regarding the building and its facilities were primarily under the control of students.

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<sup>4</sup> The University of Rochester History is largely based on *Rochester and Monroe County: A History and Guide*, (New York: Scrantoms, 1937) and Morris A Pierce, "History of the Campuses and Buildings of the University of Rochester" (University of Rochester, Rush Rhees Library, 2022) online at <http://waterworkshistory.us/UR/index.htm>.

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The university hired prominent architects Edwin S. Gordon and William Kaelber to design the original campus layout and buildings, with some consultation by landscape designers Charles Platt and the Olmsted Brothers. The firm of Gordon and Kaelber was Rochester's largest architectural firm for much of the early to mid-twentieth century. The firm had numerous significant Rochester buildings in its design portfolio, including the Eastman Theatre and School of Music (1922 and 1921, NYS Register listed 1984), the Democrat and Chronicle Building (ca. 1927), Rochester Dental Dispensary (1917, NR listed 1983), the office building for The Gleason Works (ca. 1910), the Southeast Branch Y.M.C.A (ca. 1923), Brighton Presbyterian Church (ca. 1920), Rundel Memorial Library (ca.1934-36, NR listed 1985), and Saints Peter & Paul Church (1911, NR listed 2012), along with additions and alterations to Rochester General Hospital and numerous residential projects.<sup>6</sup>

The Olmsted Brothers company, established in 1898 by brothers John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., played a minor role in the design of the university's campus and landscape, as they were providing consultation to Gordon and Kaelber. The brothers were the stepson and son of renowned landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. The Olmsted Brothers were highly regarded, and their high-profile project portfolio included the grounds of numerous park systems, universities, exposition grounds, hospitals, and residential neighborhoods within Rochester and across the country. The Olmsted Brothers were likely responsible for creating the park-like settings of plantings and walkways throughout each of the quads, although in an unofficial consulting capacity.

When the River Campus opened in 1930, it was composed of three main quadrangles: Eastman, Wilson, and Fraternity. (See Figure 8.1.) The Eastman Quadrangle featured the Rush Rhees Library, named after the president of the university, at the head (east end) and included Morey, Lattimore, Bausch & Lomb, and Dewey Halls stretching westward. These four buildings were to house classrooms for specific departments. To the north was Wilson Quadrangle, which included Crosby and Burton Halls facing the north elevations of the Morey and Lattimore buildings and the Goergen Athletic Center, Field House, and athletic fields. Sitting to the northwest of Eastman Quadrangle was the Fraternity Quadrangle, which included Todd Union at the southern end and seven fraternal homes stretching to the north by the end of 1931. The larger buildings making up the

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<sup>5</sup> H. A. S., "The Story Back of Todd Union: A Comfortable Campus Club for Students and Alumni," *Rochester Review*, 1931, Vol. X, No. 1, 3-6.

<sup>6</sup> *A Monograph of the Work of Gordon & Kaelber Architects* (New York City, NY: Architectural Catalog Co., 1923).



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Eastman Quadrangle and Goergen Athletic Center, as well as Todd Union and the fraternal buildings, were designed in Georgian Revival style. [See Figure 8.2.]

The original 1930 drawings show the ground floor housing a kitchen, cafeteria (informal dining) and private dining rooms located in the west wing, store, offices, coat room, men's restrooms (the campus was male-only until 1955), and a locker room for the cafeteria workers. [See Figure 7.2.] The rear staircase provided an exit from the back of the building, while the main corridor and cafeteria space were accessed by the front staircases. At the rear of the building was a freight elevator used by food services. The original plans show the corridor and barber shop having a terrazzo floor, the cafeteria dining space with a wood floor, and the kitchen having a red ceramic tile floor. All other areas including the general store, back hallway, storage, and locker rooms had cement flooring. Much of the original flooring remains and is exposed, with few areas now covered with carpet. Walls throughout this level were glazed brick and plaster, with decorative wainscoting in the dining hall.

The first floor originally housed the student lounge, student activities offices, a kitchen, and formal dining hall that utilized the entire west wing. In the original layout, two main staircases were open to the lobby and lounge with operable folding doors that separated the lounge from the formal dining hall. Doors from the lobby and the rear stair hall opened onto the terrace above the ground level extension at the southeast corner of the building. With the exceptions of a few drywall partitions installed to further separate the lounge and dining hall and the removal of office partitions in the east wing to allow for an open dance studio, the first floor remains relatively intact. Where new partitions have been installed, the drywall allows for the reveal of the original opening trim. The third floor remains almost completely intact, apart from the division of the former game room into two separate classroom spaces with two small offices at the back – one of which was the GLF office.

Alterations to the interior of the building have not significantly transformed the historic layout and mainly consist of rooms inserted into the original general store location in the east wing and changes of the center space from a kitchen and dining hall to a mailroom and banking center on the ground floor. On the first floor, alterations include the enclosure of the historic staircases, and installation of rooms within the former kitchen and serving room at the center-rear. Some of the historic openings between the lounge, lobby, and dining hall have been infilled, but columns and trim remain to indicate where these spaces had originally been connected. The second (upper) floor remains intact except for a few walls within the original billiards room to create two separate classroom spaces and two small offices. Although the interior has undergone several renovations since

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Todd Union's construction, the intent of the historic floorplan on each floor can still be understood.<sup>7</sup> These alterations are also consistent with the purpose of an educational campus, which must be able to adapt to the changing needs and technologies of the time. The building remains proudly dominant at the head of the Fraternity Quad.

Over the following decades, the purpose and use of Todd Union changed. When Wilson Commons was built as a new, larger student union in 1973-6, the function Todd Union was reduced to house the campus mail center, as well as the university radio station WRUR. The building now holds the mail center, radio station, banking services, administrative offices, and theater rooms. The new Wilson Commons would house a majority of student activities and groups that previously had offices in Todd Union. The building would also have a snack bar, lounge, and recreation area, all of which were previously located in Todd Union.

## **CRITERION A: Social History/LGBT**

Thirty-nine years after the University of Rochester's River Campus was established, one of the most recognized events in LGBTQ+ history took place. The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located on Christopher Street in New York City's Greenwich Village neighborhood, was raided by NYC police on June 28, 1969. Over the course of several days, members of the gay community gathered in the street each evening to fight back against the police. This uprising is generally considered the catalyst for the gay rights movement in the United States; however, the struggle for gay rights began prior to Stonewall, as groups were already forming in New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other cities to petition for the recognition of gay and lesbian people and for an end to discrimination against them. In the 1950s, activists and groups began seeking the right to exist openly in society without fear of arrest or persecution; the term "homophile" was then in common use for gay and lesbian organizations. During this time, the two main homophile organizations were the Mattachine Society, founded by a group of five gay men in Los Angeles in 1951, with a New York council organized in 1955, and the Daughters of Bilitis, a women's group established in San Francisco in 1955, with a New York chapter organized in 1958. These groups were small, primarily urban, and although they included

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<sup>7</sup>Information about changes to Todd Union were gathered from several years of digitized architectural drawings provided by the University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation.

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many young people, their membership failed to attract the more radical members of the gay and lesbian community.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1950s and early 1960s, very few people publicly acknowledged that they were homosexual, mainly because gay people experienced profound legal, religious, medical, and social oppression. Being gay was regarded as a sin, a mental illness, and an abomination. In 1953, President Eisenhower issued an executive order barring homosexuals from employment in the federal government and in many states, including New York, people were fired from jobs and evicted from apartments due to their sexual orientation. In commercial establishments, such as bars, there were policies against same-sex dancing and kissing, and a requirement to wear at least three articles of clothing of one's assigned gender at birth. There were also policies of the New York Liquor Authority that made it illegal for a licensed bar to sell alcohol to someone who was known to be gay.<sup>9</sup> Very few safe places existed where gay men and lesbians could openly meet. Bar owners that didn't adhere to the law often found their establishments surveilled, raided by police, and, often closed; however, the 1960s also brought a period of significant social change in the United States, with sexual liberation, the anti-war/Vietnam, civil rights, and women's rights movements, all of which had gay and lesbian participants. This brought greater awareness to overlooked or marginalized members of American society.<sup>10</sup> The events that took place at the Stonewall Inn and surrounding neighborhood between June 28 and July 3, 1969 became the spark that helped ignite dramatic changes in the activism leading to the gay liberation and the gay rights movements.

Although Stonewall served as an inspiration for many, it wasn't the direct catalyst for every local group, which were often founded to address the specific needs of a community. Homosexuals in Rochester, for example, experienced the same kind of stigmatization and discrimination as gay people throughout the country. During the 1960s and 1970s, raids on known gay gathering places demonstrated a hostility towards homosexuality that caused fear within the community. Several local gay bars, such as the Rustic Bar, Dick's Tavern, Jim's Bar, and Rosie's Bar, none of which are extant today, were common targets, and patrons were often victims of entrapment, or charged by the police with loitering. In Rochester, a homosexual didn't have to commit a crime to be included in the police department's file of sex offenders. Detective Joan Mathers, coordinator of the police file, said that a number of people listed as homosexuals were not arrested; however, suspicious behavior was

<sup>8</sup> John D'Emilio, "It Didn't Start with Stonewall," *Gay Community News*, June 23, 1979, 20.

<sup>9</sup> See "*Julius' Bar*, New York, New York County," *National Register Nomination Registration Form*, January 2016.

<sup>10</sup> John D'Emilio, "It Didn't Start with Stonewall," *Gay Community News*, June 23, 1979, 20.

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enough to warrant an arrest. The Rochester Civil Rights riots, which took place in 1964, sparked interest in reviewing old policies and practices towards the city's African American population that had resulted in substandard housing, employment, and health care. This provided perhaps a more direct inspiration to the city's gay community, which, after the Gay Liberation Front was founded, adopted the immediate political goals of seeking passage of a fair employment act, which would ban job discrimination based on sexual orientation, amendment of the present anti-discrimination laws to include sexual orientation, and a repeal of the consensual sodomy law.<sup>11</sup>

**Gay Liberation Front, The University of Rochester & Todd Union**

After the events at Stonewall, the movement for gay liberation found momentum within the larger gay and lesbian community. The gay liberation movement dates to the period immediately following Stonewall. Before demanding their civil rights as citizens and equal access to society's institutions, such as employment, health care and marriage, gay people simply demanded to be seen and recognized for who they were. Stonewall both coincided with and unleashed a new and more militant type of activism that came of age in the civil rights era and aligned with other counter culture movements of the time, such as radical feminism and Black Power. Gay liberation, as this movement became known, was a radical effort to counter the secrecy and shame associated with being gay by encouraging homosexuals to come out and live openly as gay people in society. Gay liberation celebrated the sexual revolution and rather than seeking to blend into the mainstream, gay liberation sought to stand out, pledging to abolish social institutions such as capitalism and transform society to a more individualistic coalition of groups with shared interests. It was the radical and confrontational nature of the gay liberation movement that later energized the drive to demand equality and civil rights under the law. The era saw the formation of a number of activist groups advocating sexual liberation and a radical counter culture while also advocating against discrimination in all aspects of society.

Among the most well-known organizations of the era was the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a national coalition of radical homosexual groups looking to promote gay pride and combat the oppression of gay people in all aspects of society. Organized in New York City in the months after Stonewall, a committee of the Mattachine Action Committee withdrew and renamed itself the Gay Liberation Front. Chapters formed throughout the

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<sup>11</sup> Mandi Harris, "From Out of the Closet...", *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, December 10, 1972, 1C & 8C.

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country in thirty-four states and the District of Columbia.<sup>12</sup> While some worked cooperatively, others were independent, and many groups formed on college campuses. The GLF brought the gay community together to discuss the nature of gay oppression and to explore the potential for united action. These groups actively claimed the word gay, adopted a PRIDE agenda, and demanded liberation.

The GLF came to the University of Rochester students through two students who did not initially know one another. Undergraduate Larry Fine took out an anonymous advertisement in the May 8, 1970, publication of the *Campus Times* that read, “TAKE HEART BROTHERS, Gay Lib is coming!” Fine had recently begun to realize his homosexual identity and visited San Francisco in search of a gay community. He returned to Rochester “fired up,” as he put it. In reality, the organizing force behind the organization was Ph.D. candidate Bob Osborn, who ran an advertisement in the September 1970 issue of *Campus Times*: “UR Gay Liberation Front will hold an interest meeting...Open to all people who believe that realization of basic civil rights for all minority groups must come from organized efforts.”<sup>13</sup> Osborn had experience in political advocacy as a participant and organizer of events associated with the African American civil rights movement during the 1960s and believed gay liberation to be an outgrowth of the African American civil rights movement.<sup>14</sup> The meeting was held on October 3, 1970 in Todd Union, with Osborn service as moderator and included guest speakers from the Cornell GLF, and the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier.

While Osborn and Fine only expected a few people to show up for the first meeting, the *Campus Times* reported that there were “approximately 100” in attendance.<sup>15</sup> Soon after, Osborn and other students in the organization successfully petitioned the UR Student Activities Office for official recognition as a student organization and it began to receive funding. The group was given an office on the second floor of Todd Union in a small, unpretentious office known as room 202-D. It was in this small room that the Gay Liberation Front established a library of books about homosexuality, resources for people struggling with their sexuality, and a hotline for those with questions and in need of advice or counseling. Todd Union’s central location was ideal for the GLF as the building was originally designed to be a hub for students to meet, explore their interests, and extend their knowledge beyond the classroom. [See Figure 8.3]

<sup>12</sup> Gay Library, Library of Congress Research Guides. Online at <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/after-stonewall>.

<sup>13</sup> Karen McCally, “Forty Years Out,” *Rochester Review*, July-August 2013, online at [https://www.rochester.edu/pr/Review/V75N6/0401\\_emptycloset.html](https://www.rochester.edu/pr/Review/V75N6/0401_emptycloset.html).

<sup>14</sup> McCally, “Forty Years Out.”

<sup>15</sup> *Campus Times*, December 13, 1970.

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The first several meetings were mainly led by Bob Osborn, who scheduled speakers, chose discussion topics, and welcomed students and Rochesterians alike. Some of the first topics discussed at GLF meetings included “Military Service and the Homosexual,” “Homosexuals and the Law,” “Women’s Liberation,” and “Dialogue with the Church.” The meetings were attended by many people and ideas began circulating about how they could make changes on campus, in Rochester, and beyond. Eventually, 202-D in Todd Union became more than an office and meeting location for the GLF, as it hosted many events such as the “Liberation Dance,” picnics, and planning for public and political advocacy. Karen Hagberg, a Ph.D. student in musicology at the Eastman School of Music, had the idea of developing a speaker’s bureau made up of club members who would volunteer to speak at different events. As a program of the GLF, the speaker’s bureau engagements were organized, scheduled, and prepared in Todd Union.

Much to the group’s delight, the speaker’s bureau was well received, not only by the UR campus, but also by the outside community. A number of the GLF members gave presentations at UR classes, nearby college campuses that included SUNY Brockport, Nazareth College, and Monroe Community College, as well as local high schools, and a number of other interested community organizations. While the group did some outreach, most of their speaking engagements were the result of invitations from teachers who were seeking to educate their students and expose them to members of the gay community. According to many of the founding members, the organization was widely accepted by the majority of the students, faculty, and administration at the University of Rochester. They also stated that the university helped student members of the GLF stay anonymous, only requiring that the organization’s officers be named in Student Activities records. In the face of instances of homophobia and backlash, the general atmosphere was supportive of the group, and many straight students attended the GLF’s events.

While the speaker’s bureau was typically accepted with their presentations, occasional backlash surfaced from the community. In the early 1970s, Tim Maines, a teacher at Greece Arcadia High School, invited members of the GLF to his classroom while teaching a unit about civil rights movements. The speakers discussed homosexuality in general and the civil rights struggles to a crowd of students who were incredibly interested in the discussion. For many attending the speaker’s bureau presentation, this was their first interaction with gay people and Maines was met with discipline from the school district after complaints were filed from parents. The official reason was the that overcrowding of the school’s hallways caused a safety hazard when in fact, the only complaints were from parents of students who hadn’t attended the event. Maines would later say, “The

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impact of that, that the people who got to see and hear the speakers weren't the ones calling the police to complain, was a profound statement on the power of visibility."<sup>16</sup> The program helped establish more of an understanding throughout the campus and the wider community, as more people were open to an introduction to issues of sexuality and gay rights.<sup>17</sup>

The students involved in GLF were fully dedicated to fighting for equal rights. Students Bob Osborn, R.J. Alaca, and Marshall Goodman traveled to the New York State Assembly and addressed the Special Committee on Discrimination Against Homosexuals at the first ever public hearing for the special committee on January 7, 1971 in Albany. In their testimony, they noted that "upstate and small city homosexuals, although silent for a long time, are oppressed by New York State laws as least as much as those in New York City" and advocated that laws relating to sexual acts be revised, the Alcoholic Beverage be restricted, and that the Civil Rights and Human Rights Commissions assure equal rights in employment and housing.<sup>18</sup>

The GLF Rochester Chapter was very passionate about equal rights and formed a Political Action Committee that focused on promoting the passage of anti-discrimination legislation. In 1971, the GLF sent student representatives to the March on Albany for Gay Rights that occurred March 13-14, 1971, which was the first statewide march for gay rights in the country. They discussed legislation that was directed at banning discrimination in housing, employment, licensing, and more, as well as repealing sodomy and age of consent laws. These efforts resulted in two women exchanging marriage vows at the River Campus of the University of Rochester on April 9, 1972, which then prompted three more couples to organize marriage ceremonies through the GLF organization. Although these ceremonies were important in symbolizing the right to marriage equality, same-sex marriage was not yet legal in New York or within the United States. It would be another forty years before Governor Andrews Cuomo signed the Marriage Equality Act into New York state law on June 24, 2011, and another four years until the United States Supreme Court announced its decision in the Obergefell v. Hodges case on June 26, 2015, making same-sex marriage legal nationwide.

The GLF also offered students and community members a number of services such as legal assistance, travel information, and counseling. The Todd Union office had a rotating staff that was available to take calls or hear from people visiting the office with questions or concerns. The members also promoted sexual health and held

<sup>16</sup> Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, "Right to Love," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 13A.

<sup>17</sup> Out Alliance, "The Rainbow Dialogues" <http://www.rainbowdialogues.com/2021-dialogues/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Statement of the Rochester Gay Community at the Special Committee of the N.Y. State Assembly on Discrimination against Homosexuals," *Empty Closet*, February-March, 1971.

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many testing clinics for sexually transmitted diseases that were increasing in the gay community. Knowing that coming out was still a scary thought for most, Osborn was adamant that the office should be a welcoming place focused on providing support and resources to the gay student community rather than a recreational hangout for GLF members. He did not want anyone who was new in discovering their identity to feel intimidated by any flirtatious or amorous behavior in the office, which could be done other places. The organization became a crucial part of the River Campus community, helped a number of students come to terms with their sexuality, and promoted tolerance and acceptance of the lesbian and gay community throughout Rochester.

**Liberation Dances**

In an effort to better connect gay and lesbian students with their heterosexual peers, as well as gain visibility in the campus community, the GLF decided to host a “Liberation Dance” in partnership with the UR Women’s Liberation group. The first dance, which welcomed everyone regardless of sexual identity, was held on December 5, 1971, in the lounge of the Frederick Douglass Building, also on the River Campus. Approximately 200 people attended, an estimated 60 percent of which were students. The public event had a live band, free beer, and a ticket cost \$1.00. Due to the success of the first dance, others were planned for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Valentine’s Day in 1972.

These dances were significant events, as being gay was still highly stigmatized and criminalized in New York and throughout the country. Gay bars in Rochester were constantly being raided by the Rochester Police Department and homosexual men were often victims of entrapment.<sup>19</sup> Hosting a “liberation dance” was therefore a risky decision, as it was encouraging public displays of homosexuality. The dances received a lot of attention from students who were not involved with the GLF. Many students would stop outside the ballroom doors to watch same-sex couples dance with each other. While others were bolder and joined the dance, most of the heterosexual students watched or attended out of curiosity. Attendance at the dances was always quite large, with the great majority of participants from the gay and lesbian community.

In a letter to the editor of the *Campus Times*, which was then reprinted in the first edition of *The Empty Closet*, Patti Evans, using the pseudonym Patricia Evers, wrote: “What happened in the MDC lounge Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>? I was there: let me tell you a little about it. There were male homosexuals, female homosexuals,

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<sup>19</sup> Gerald Goldberg, “Homosexuals and the Law,” *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, December 13, 1972, 1C-8C.



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heterosexual women, heterosexual men, black and whites. What was such an unusual conglomeration of people doing in the lounge? They were participating in the most progressive and beautiful activity I've ever seen on this campus." She described the freedom the liberation dance provided as a "unique experience in human interaction, free from the rules and regulations of a society that dictates to its people what is and is not natural for them. I believe the people in attendance found out more about human nature than they ever could from one of our current textbooks. What's more, perhaps for the first time in their lives, these people found out what homosexuals are: a group of people who are in no other way but their sexual orientation different from any other group of people; people who enjoy each other's company and who interact with each other with warmth and sincerity." <sup>20</sup>

### **The Empty Closet**

Another important connection between Todd Union and the GLF was the decision to use the office to publish a gay newspaper would be beneficial in spreading the word about the gay liberation movement. The GLF selected the name *The Empty Closet* as it was inclusive and less controversial than other names suggested. The first copy of *The Empty Closet* was published in January 1971 from Todd Union room 202D and pages were assembled in the Todd Union lounge.<sup>21</sup> The first edition noted that, "The Rochester Gay Liberation Front is an association of people studying the nature of gay oppression and the potential for liberation. Meetings are open to all who believe that basic civil rights and human dignity for all minority groups come from organized effort. The world is what you make it. Let's make it together. Come out!" <sup>22</sup>

The newspaper included campus and national news, announcements about gay social events, student poetry, student essays and articles written by GLF members to show other students they were not alone. While a majority of articles were signed by the authors, some members of the organization preferred to post under pseudonyms. Students distributed copies of the newspaper to local gay bars to share news with Rochester's gay community. Over the years, the newspaper retained its focus on political organizing and gaining equal protections under the law while promoting GLF meetings and events. The newspaper provided a network for students and advertised marches and coordinated rides for these events and followed up by reporting on the event. This included a march on Albany that took place on March 14, 1971, that demonstrated for an end to

<sup>20</sup> Patricia Evers, "On Norms and Nature," *The Empty Closet*, January 1971, 1 edition, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Information derived from *The Empty Closet* newspaper.

<sup>22</sup> *The Empty Closet*, January 1971, 1 edition, 1.

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oppressive laws against homosexuals in New York State. The students also organized transportation to the second Christopher Street Day Liberation March in New York City, now referred to as the Pride March.

The news section of the paper focused on the criminalization of homosexuals and the harm done to members of the LGBTQ+ community, often singling out incidents and profiling that occurred in Rochester. *The Empty Closet* warned the community about the Rochester police's "homo-file," which was a list of suspected gay people that was published in Rochester's largest newspaper, the *Democrat and Chronicle*. The newspaper took on local issues of discrimination and wrote a number of articles on the use of the word "fag" in local radio ads and eventually convinced the local radio stations to remove the ads from airing in Rochester. *The Empty Closet* also acknowledged an instance of harassment on campus, when a gay student was locked in his room by other students after finding out that he had a boyfriend. Notices in the paper warned students of entrapment that was occurring throughout the city during the summer of 1971. In June 1971, the students of the GLF were told about discrimination and incidents of blackmail occurring on the Eastman campus. Students saw *The Empty Closet* as a way to take action against Flora Burton, Dean of Students at the Eastman School of Music. Burton was allegedly using students as spies to implicate students believed to be gay. Burton then extracted confessions from these students and threatened to send the confessions to their parents or expel them if they did not change their ways. Despite the paper's efforts, most instances of profiling and threat failed to lead to any real action against Burton.

What had started as a four-page newsletter grew into a thirty-plus-page monthly newspaper. GLF members active in the newspaper made a difference in the Rochester community by helping to establish a more welcoming campus and community by calling out discrimination and promoting acceptance. Members also appeared on WROC-TV, the local news station, and many local radio shows such as "Green Thursdays" and "Lesbian Nation," both produced by former members of the GLF.<sup>23</sup> In 1973, the decision was made to establish a community organization separate from the UR GLF and move *The Empty Closet* publication off-campus to the Auditorium Center at 875 East Main Street. The GLF felt that moving the newspaper off-campus would allow the paper to reach more of the LGBTQ+ community. Today, the newspaper continues to be published by the Out Alliance, an organization that had its origins in the university's GLF and the former Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley. *The Empty Closet* is published eleven times a year, with a circulation of about 5,000 copies and an online version. It is the oldest LGBTQ+ newspaper in New York state and is the second longest running

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LGBTQ+ newspaper in the nation, following the *Washington Blade*.<sup>24</sup> The newspaper has documented and continues to document LGBTQ+ history in Rochester and in the nation. Through the work of the GLF, their successors, and other community LGBTQ+ organizations, the newspaper helped to make Rochester a more accepting community and establish Rochester as one of the top twenty most gay-friendly cities in the country.<sup>25</sup>

**Impacts Beyond Todd Union**

The University of Rochester's GLF organization included non-student community members since its first meeting in October 1970. The GLF at the University of Rochester began to garner outside, non-student interest due to a lack of other organizations of its kind in Rochester at the time. This interest led to a number of community members attending meetings and becoming involved in the group's events and advocacy. As the GLF continued to attract community members, the demographics of the group changed, and by the end of 1971, it had roughly 200 members, but only twelve were students at the University of Rochester or the Eastman School of Music. As a result of the large community presence, the Student Activities Office at the university reconsidered funding for the GLF. Some members understood the school's concerns, but students like Larry Fine found this decision to be hostile and unnecessary and argued against it. Eventually, the group held a vote in the spring of 1973 and unanimously agreed to establish two separate groups: a student organization at the University of Rochester and an off-campus organization for the Rochester community. The student organization, led by undergraduates, would stay on campus as the GLF and remain in Todd Union. Two community organizations split from the university's GLF, known as the Gay Brotherhood and Gay Revolution of Women, later known as the Lesbian Resource Center.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, these and other community organizations united under the name the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley, which today is known as the Out Alliance.

Following the split, the student-led GLF organization remained at about twelve students but continued to promote with the speaker's bureau and work on community advocacy. In 1977, a member of the GLF reported in *The Empty Closet* that the University of Rochester Gay Liberation Front was alive and well and that after the split with the Gay Alliance, the GLF became a small organization devoted to the needs of the university

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<sup>23</sup> Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, "Right to Love," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 1A-13A.

<sup>24</sup> Karen McCally, "Forty Years Out," *Rochester Review*, 2013, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett J Loudon, "Rochester's Gay Community Is Gaining Ground," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, July 31, 1994, 1A-13A.

<sup>26</sup> Karen McCally, "Forty Years Out," *Rochester Review*, 2013, 32.

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community. He also reported that the GLF continued to hold meetings and work from their office in Todd Union until September 1976, when they moved into room 132 in the new Wilson Commons.<sup>27</sup> Interest waned in the mid-to-late 1970s as many people still feared coming out, and the student activities committee decided to defund the organization once it became inactive.

In the mid-1970s, Patti Evans, a former GLF member and then-current member of the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley, co-hosted the *Lesbian Nation* radio show on WCMF, a local Rochester radio station. Her show, along with *Green Thursdays*, raised visibility of the Rochester area's gay community and served as a lifeline for some. Those feeling isolated were grateful to finally find someone to talk to.<sup>28</sup> During the same period, Rochester's gay and lesbian community began to grow more visible, but arrests continued, especially in Genesee Valley Park. Gay bars began to flourish, but same-sex dancing was still taboo. It was against this backdrop that activists found their voice.

In 1981, an announcement was placed in *The Empty Closet* that a new group had formed at the university called the Gay Academic Union (GAU). This group was composed of students, faculty, and staff of the university's three campuses (River Campus, Medical Center, and Eastman School of Music). The goal of the group was to provide a social atmosphere and an educational resource for gay people at the university. At the time the announcement was published, the GAU was working on a constitution to submit to the university's Student Association so the organization could become a member group, which would make it eligible for funding and full use of the university facilities.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1980s, the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley was officially recognized with tax-exempt status, and, after some statewide resistance, the longstanding sodomy law was struck down. Tim Maines, a local school teacher, maintained that visibility was key to moving civil and equal rights forward for gay people. He stated, "In the course of all that time, I saw over and over again the power that visibility had on changing people's attitudes and perceptions."<sup>30</sup> In 1985, Maines became the first openly gay man elected to public office in New York state, serving on the Rochester City Council for twenty years. In 1989, hundreds of people participated in the first pride parade on Main Street in Rochester, a celebratory event that brought the gay community together.

<sup>27</sup> Jay Stratton, "U of R GLF News," *The Empty Closet*, March 1977, 70 edition, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin Indovino, *Shoulders to Stand On: The LGBT History of Rochester*. DVD. United States: Out Alliance, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> "U of R Gay Academic Union Forms," *The Empty Closet*, November 1981, 121 edition, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, "Right to Love," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 12A.

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Along with these wins were some setbacks. A drastic change came beginning in the early 1980s with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, which not only shattered the gay population but brought about a new fear both within and outside of the community. With the terrible disease plaguing the community, Rochester native and gay activist Thomas Warfield, who was then living in NYC, said that the gay liberation movement had mainly become a gay white-male movement and that so many people in the margins of the community weren't being considered. In spite of this, he felt that with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, the once separated parts of the gay community were able to come together for the greater good and a unified cause.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1990s and 2000s, local leaders in the Rochester community continued to advocate and work for gay awareness. In 1993, The Rochester Lesbian and Gay Film Festival was launched, later changing its name to *ImageOut*. With these steps forward came two federal laws enacted in the 1990s that gave a crushing blow to the gay community and had lasting effects for decades. The first law was commonly known as "Don't ask, don't tell," which went into effect in 1993 and fostered discrimination in the military. The second was the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, which defined marriage as an act between a man and a woman. These federal laws halted much of the progress that the gay community and its allies made across the nation, but increased efforts in advocacy and the fight for equality.

On June 24, 2011, thirty-nine years after two women exchanged vows on the River Campus, New York's Marriage Equality Act was signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo, allowing same-sex couples to marry legally in New York for the first time. Four years later, on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage, legalizing it in all fifty states and requiring states to honor all out-of-state same-sex marriage licenses. In Rochester, the organizations that were associated with the University of Rochester's Gay Liberation Front are still advocating and finding ways to keep the LGBTQ+ community thriving and visible. Events such as the ROC Pride Parade and newer festivals such as Rochester Black Pride show continued progress. In 2017, the Gay Alliance changed its name to Out Alliance to become more representative of the full spectrum of orientation and identity.<sup>32</sup> A place for LGBTQ+ students still remains on the University of Rochester campus, now known as The Pride Network, which meets in the campus Humanities

<sup>31</sup>Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, "Right to Love," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 13A.

<sup>32</sup>Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, "Right to Love," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 13A.

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center weekly. A “Queer Ball” is held annually by the Pride Network, in the same location as the original liberation dances and is co-sponsored by the Gay Liberation and UR Women’s Liberation group.

**Conclusion**

As one looks back over the gay liberation movement in the Rochester area, it becomes clear that the courage and determination of the founding members of the University of Rochester’s Gay Liberation Front laid the groundwork for everything that has happened within the movement since the 1970s. Although the organization was only headquartered in Todd Union from 1970-1976, it was in this building that the first liberation dances, picnics, political activism, speaker’s bureau engagements, and many other events were created. The work that started with the UR GLF attracted more advocates while paving the way for gradual shifting of attitudes and laws. Their actions and experiences over the five decades following the Stonewall uprising show the way people can change our culture while also showing how much more work lies ahead.<sup>33</sup>

A community of people, identical to other American citizens except for the objects of their affections, was united by its shared oppression and came together in the 1960s and 1970s not to “fit in” but to build their own community for themselves within the enveloping context of American society. Absorbed in asserting and demanding recognition not merely of their existence but of their rights as citizens under the law and the constitution, LGBTQ+ people created, and continue to create communities across the nation to provide for their needs, provide support when needed, and more recently to celebrate their shared past and historic sites.<sup>34</sup> The University of Rochester’s chapter of the Gay Liberation Front is rightfully considered the origin of the LGBTQ+ rights movement and activism in the Rochester area.

Todd Union was a crucial social space that bridged the gap between students and community members and helped to establish a thriving and visible LGBTQ+ community in Rochester and the surrounding areas. Although Todd Union itself has been renovated multiple times over the years to accommodate new uses and changing needs of the University’s community, it remains part of the intact original quadrangles and campus

<sup>33</sup> Meaghan M McDermott, Sean Lahman, and Mary Chao, “Right to Love,” *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 30, 2019, 1A-13A.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Meinke, “Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, DC: National Park Foundation, 2016), 01-1 – 01-13.

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buildings and stands as a reminder of how the establishment of the Gay Liberation Front organization on the university's campus was revolutionary for Rochester's LGBTQ+ community.

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*Stonewall*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, (1990). Online at <https://cris.parks.ny.gov>.

*Women's Liberation Center*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, (2021). Online at <https://cris.parks.ny.gov>.

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*Historic Context Statement for Washington's LGBTQ Resources*. (September 2019). Online at <https://planning.dc.gov/publication/dc-lgbtq-resources>.

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Schiff, Josef. "Todd Union: Lounge." *RBSCP Exhibits*. accessed July 12, 2022. <https://rbscpexhibits.lib.rochester.edu/items/show/5919>.

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Acala, RJ. Interview by Megan Klem (LSWNY), Friday, April 1, 2022.

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Hagberg, Karen. Interview by Megan Klem (LSWNY), March 31, 2022.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☒ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: **Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.29 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18N 285930 4778416  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary was drawn to include the building and its immediate setting, indicated by the sidewalks that surround the building. This sets the building off from the larger plan of the university and creates an appropriate historic setting.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Megan Klem, Preservation Planner, & Kathleen LaFrank, NYS OPRHP

organization Landmark Society of Western New York

date March 9, 2023

street & number 5 Castle Park

telephone 585-546-7029

city or town Rochester

state NY

zip code 14620

e-mail mklem@landmarksociety.org

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

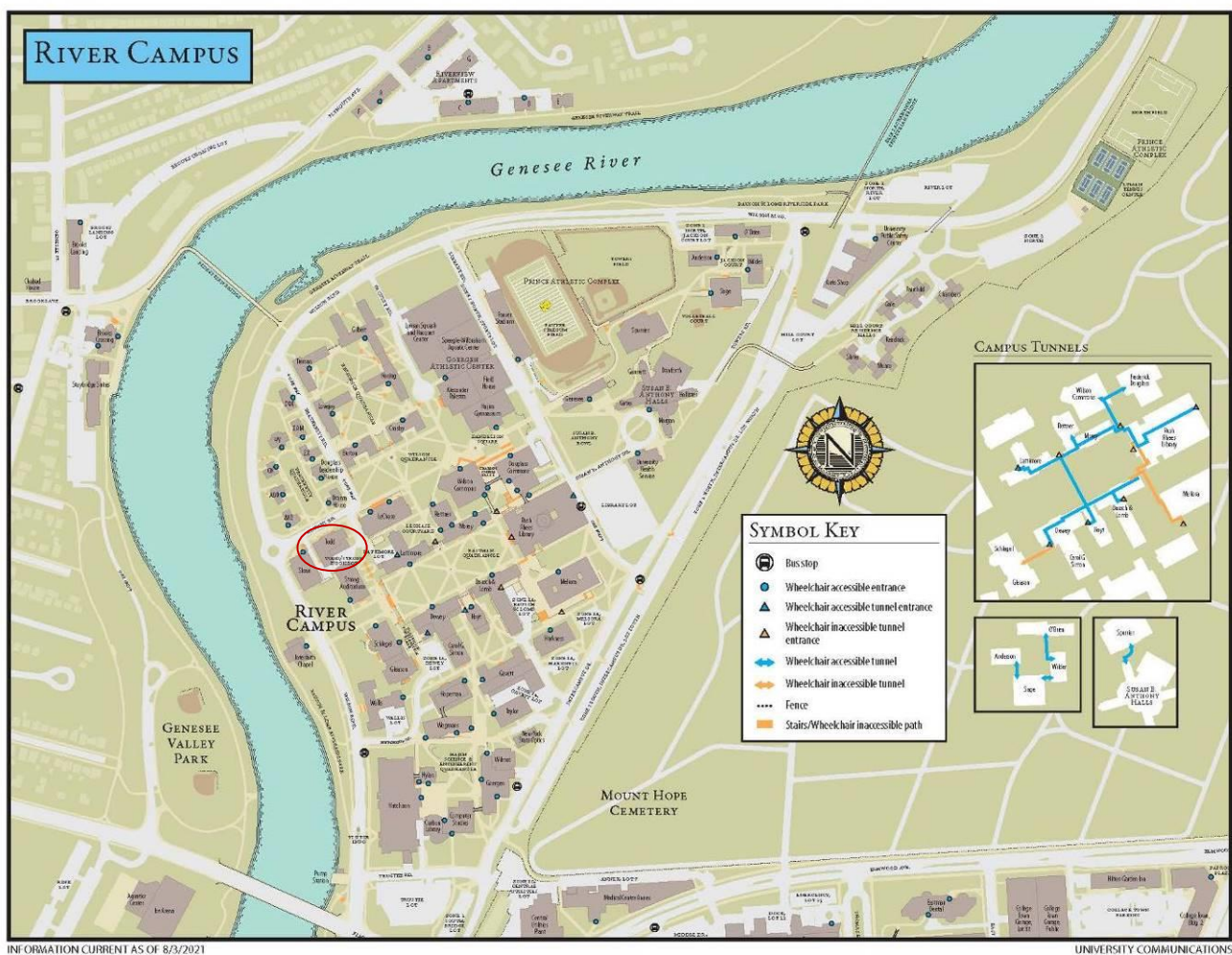


Figure 7.1: River Campus Map, 2022. Courtesy of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York. Online at [https://www.rochester.edu/maps/printable\\_maps/URmaps\\_RiverCampus.pdf](https://www.rochester.edu/maps/printable_maps/URmaps_RiverCampus.pdf).

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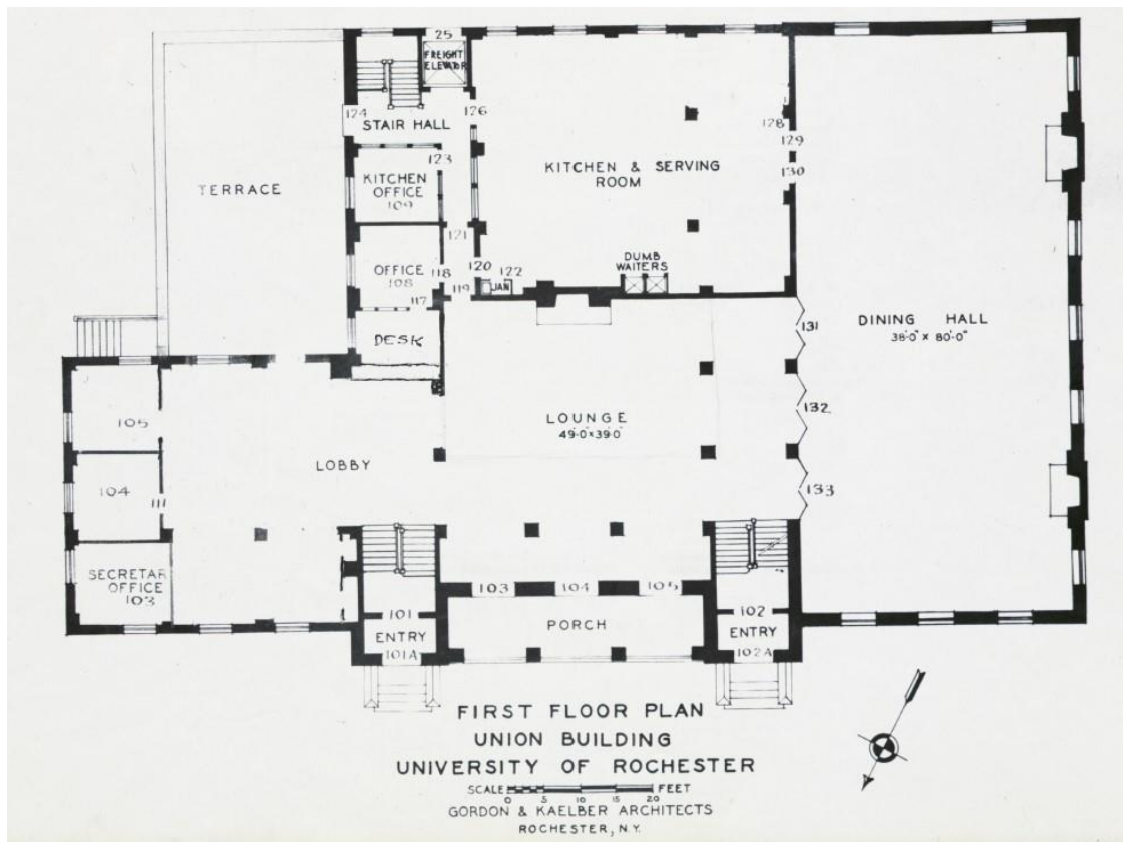


Figure 7.2: The original floor plan for the Todd Union - First Floor, by Gordon & Kaelber Architects, ca. 1929/30. Plans courtesy of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

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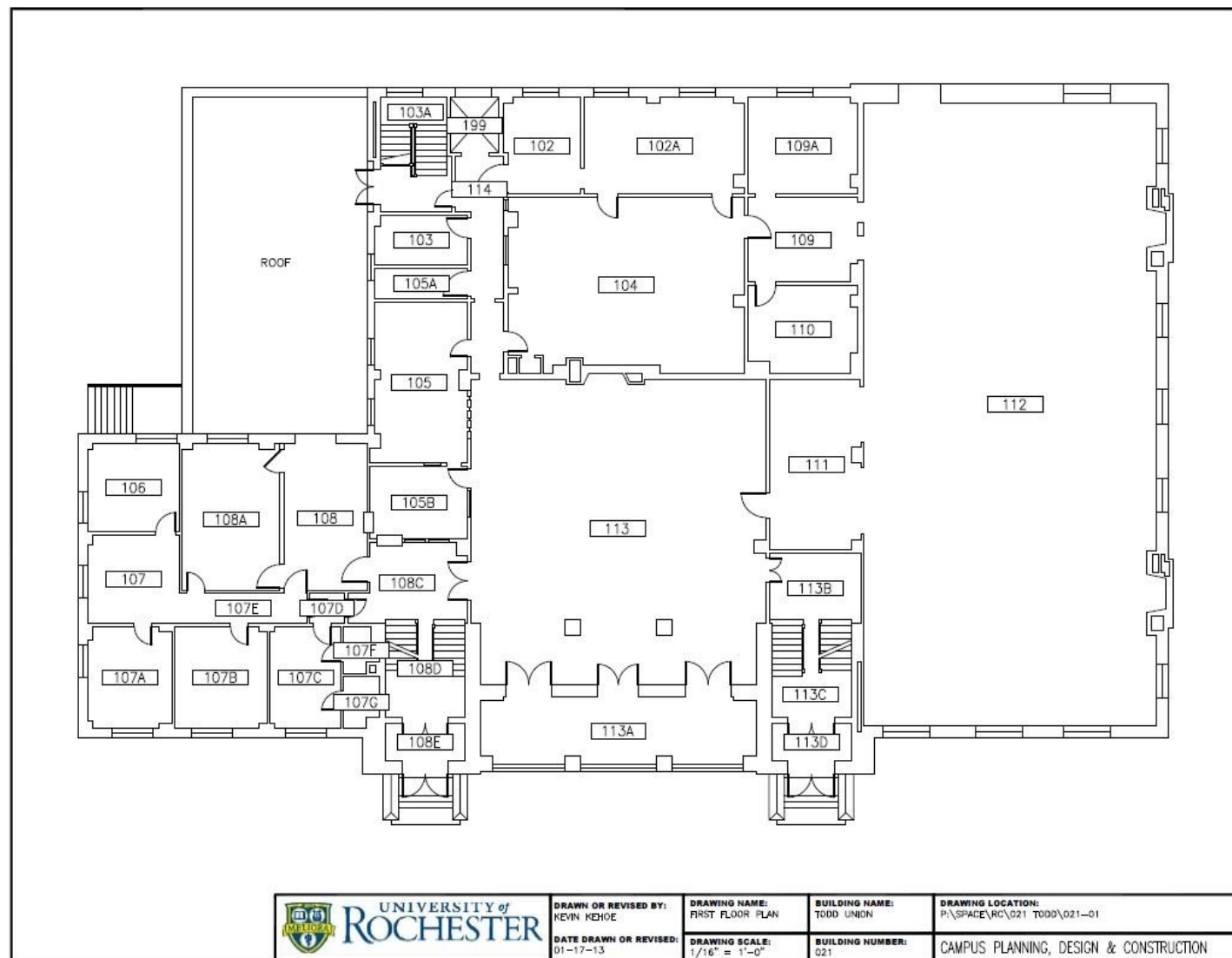


Figure 7.3: Current floor plan for the Todd Union - First Floor, ca. 2013. Note – office partitions within the east wing (106, 107, 107A, 107B, 107C, 108, and 108A) have been removed. This space is now an open dance studio. Plans courtesy of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

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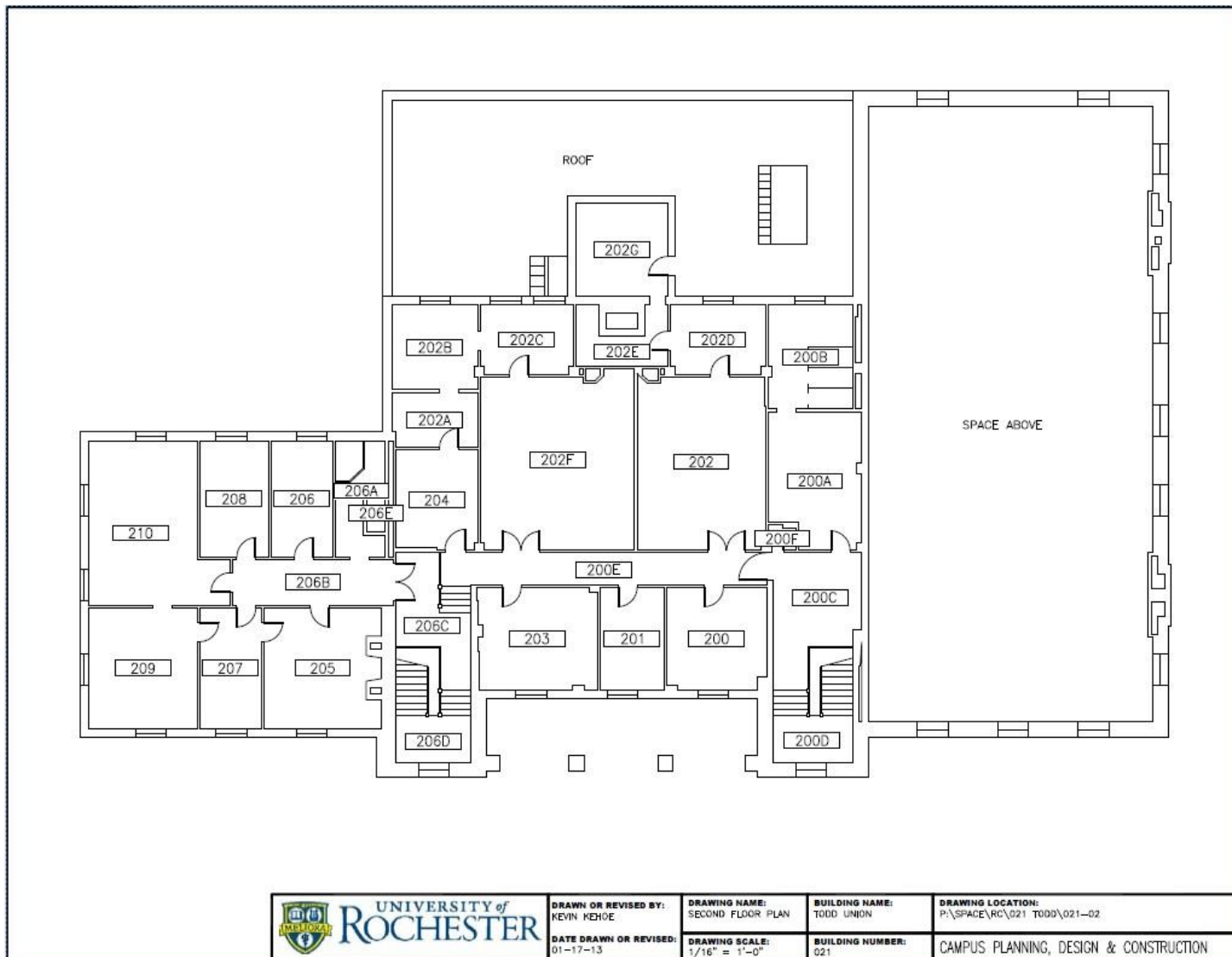


Figure 7.4: Current floor plan for the Todd Union - Second Floor, ca. 2013. Plans courtesy of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.



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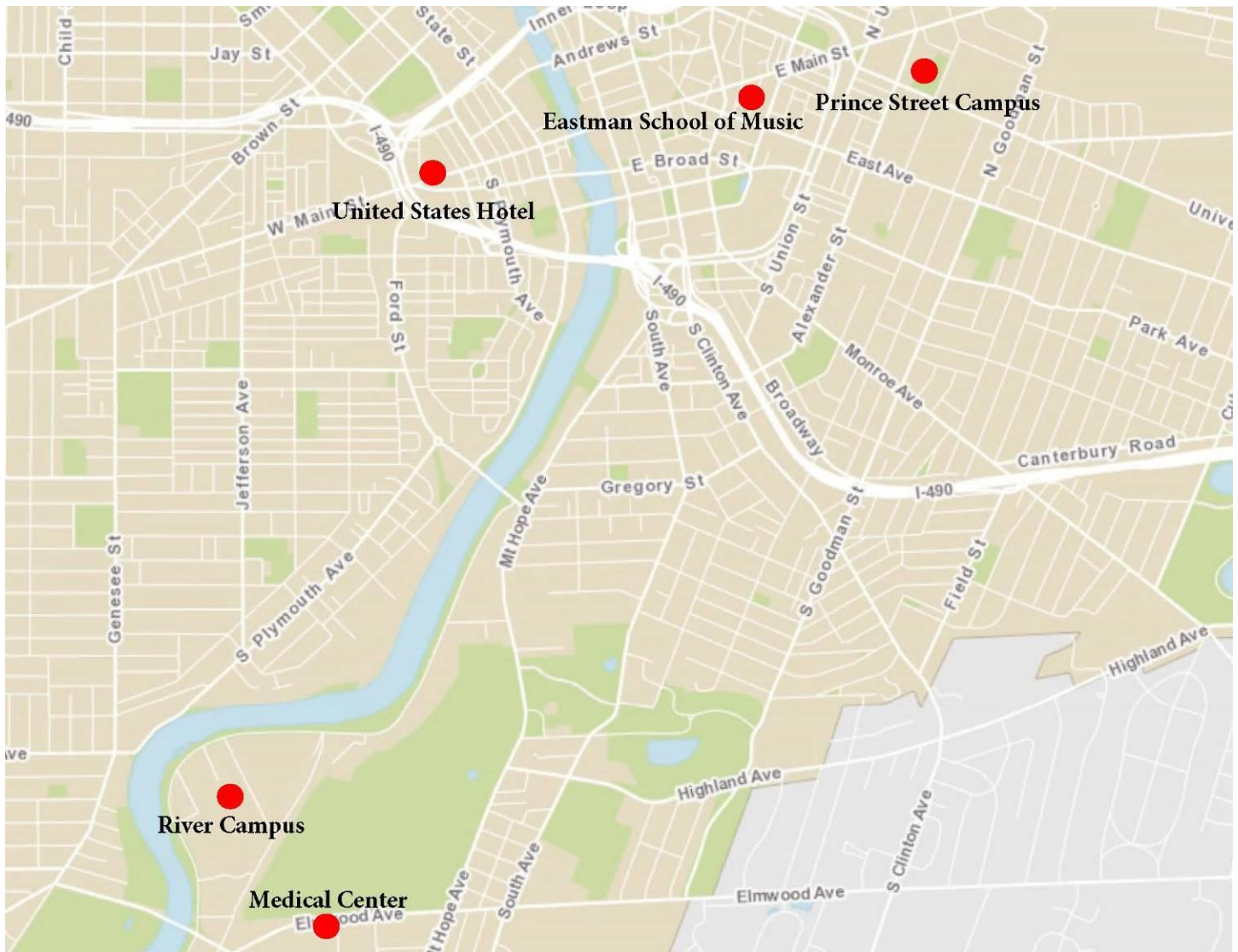


Figure 8.1: Map of Rochester showing the location of UR's campuses: United States Hotel, Prince Street Campus, Eastman School of Music, Medical Center, and River Campus.

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Figure 8.2. Todd Union ca. 1970. Photo courtesy of the Archived and Special Collections, University of Rochester's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections library, Rochester , New York.



Figure 8.3. GLF in front of Todd Union ca. 1970. Photo courtesy of the Archived and Special Collections, University of Rochester's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections library, Rochester , New York



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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger.

Name of Property: Todd Union

City or Vicinity: Rochester

County: Monroe State: New York

Photographer: Landmark Society of Western New York

Date Photographed: January & April 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 0001 of 0020: Façade and east elevation, looking southwest
- 0002 of 0020: East and rear elevations, looking northwest
- 0003 of 0020: Rear and west elevations, looking northeast
- 0004 of 0020: Front and west elevations, looking southeast
- 0005 of 0020: Lower level, Mailroom – mailboxes, looking south
- 0006 of 0020: Lower level, looking west down main hall past the mailroom
- 0007 of 0020: Main level, looking north at the eastern main entrance door
- 0008 of 0020: Main level, looking north at the eastern entrance and lobby areas
- 0009 of 0020: Main level, dance/performance studio, looking southeast
- 0010 of 0020: Main level, dance/performance studio, looking northeast
- 0011 of 0020: Main level, looking southwest through the main lounge
- 0012 of 0020: Main level, looking north at the western entrance and lobby areas
- 0013 of 0020: Main level room now used as music room / former GLF event space.
- 0014 of 0020: Main level, looking north in the rear access hallway
- 0015 of 0020: Main level, looking north in the rear entrance stairwell
- 0016 of 0020: Upper level, looking north in the former lounge and classroom space
- 0017 of 0020: View of Room 202D, showing room now used for storage.
- 0018 of 0020: Upper level, transition lobby between upper level floor elevation change
- 0019 of 0020: Upper level, looking east in the east wing hallway
- 0020 of 0020: Upper level, looking north in an office of the east wing

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

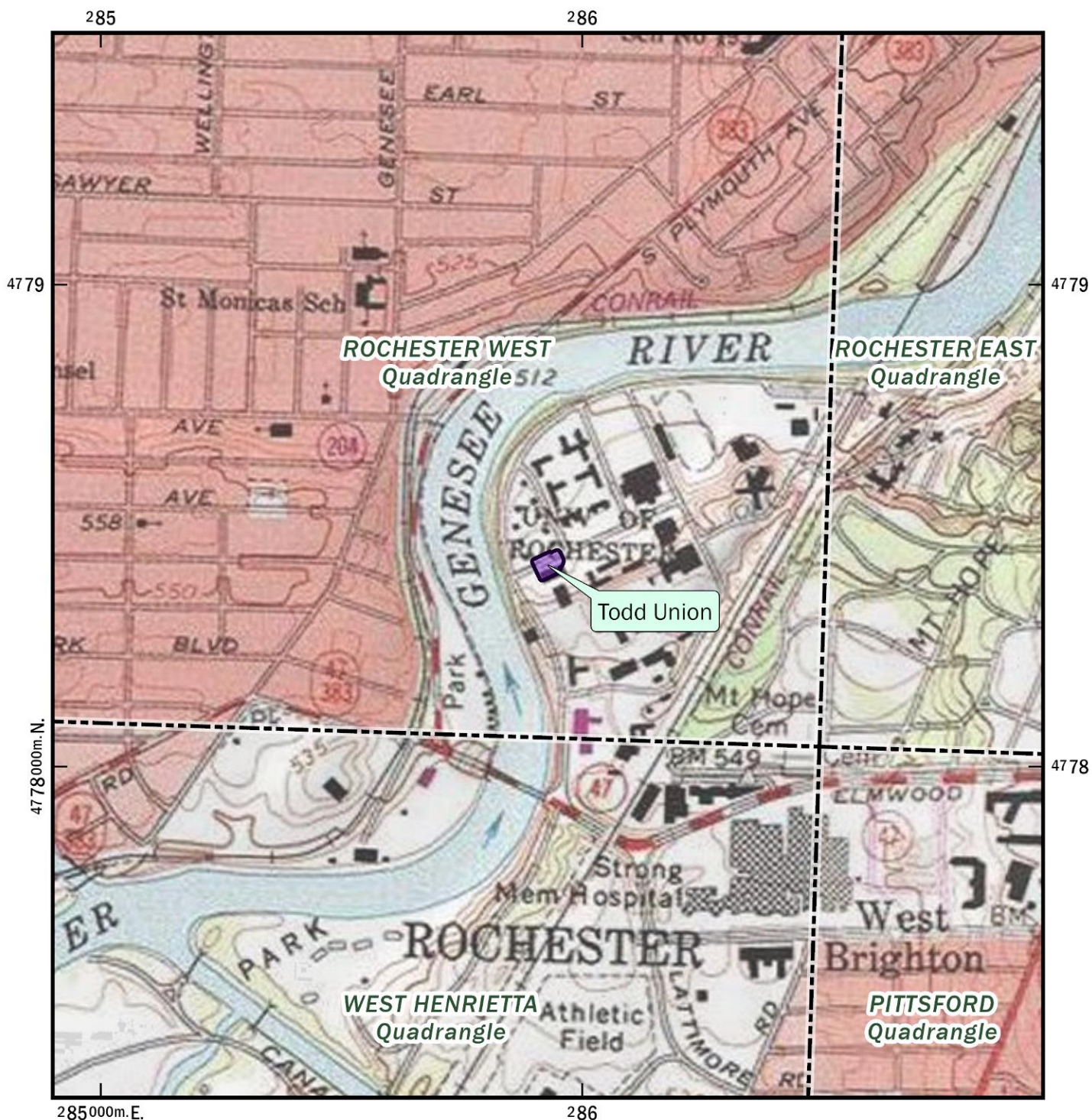
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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**1:12,000**

0 500 1000 ft

 Todd Union



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N (Meter)

Mapped 02/24/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO



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**1:1,200**

0 50 100 ft



Nomination Boundary (0.67 ac)



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

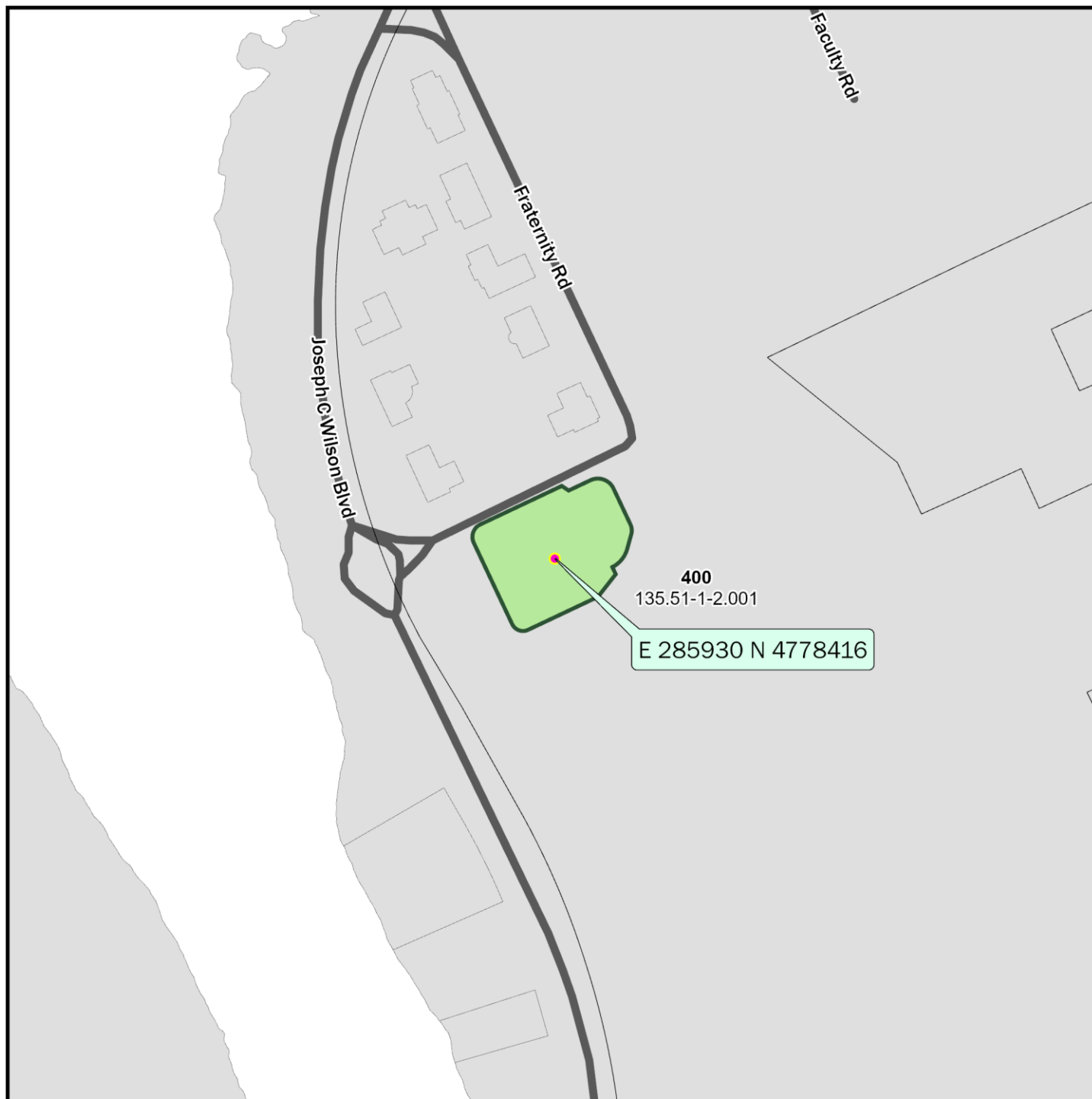
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N (Meter) ♦ New York State Orthoimagery Year: 2020 ♦ Mapped 02/24/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

**Todd Union**

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**1:2,400**

0 100 200 ft



Nomination Boundary (0.67 ac)



Tax Parcels



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N (Meter) ♦ Monroe County Parcel Year: 2021 ♦ Mapped 02/24/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO