Innovation is a Founding Concept

David L. Eisler, president
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This college was founded in 1884 by Woodbridge N. Ferris as the Big Rapids Industrial School. His objective was to provide low cost, practical training for all with a real desire to study, regardless of a lack of previous formal education. The school began with rented quarters and fifteen students. The first courses were commerce and college preparatory work. Programs in trade-technical work, pharmacy, and teacher training followed. A pioneer school of its kind, it became a state school in 1949.

Woodbridge Nathan Ferris

Helen Gillespie Ferris
Cooperative Experiences

At the Ferris Industrial School, Mr. Ferris set up model businesses in the Business Department, and for several weeks students worked in a mercantile or a banking situation.

Students could also work in a simulated business office, a freight office, a commercial exchange office, a wholesale office, a commission office and a bank.

Each student was required to carry out all of the routine transactions common to these offices.
Pharmacy Becomes a Keystone

In 1893, young Marius Preysz of Barryton, Michigan, asked for training in the subject of pharmacy in order to prepare himself for the state board examination. Mr. Ferris purchased a handbook covering the subjects required by the state board and proceeded to give Mr. Preysz the necessary instruction.

It was the successful execution of this venture, along with similar success achieved in tutoring others who followed in the footsteps of Mr. Preysz, which encouraged Mr. Ferris to establish the Department of Pharmacy as a separate entity in the Ferris Industrial School.
New Building...
With Indoor Plumbing
And in 1895...
Incandescent Lights
The Importance of Early Education

One of the Ferris' more innovative programs in the early part of the century involved teaching women how to teach kindergarten.

The school also offered kindergarten classes for youngsters at which the teachers practiced their methods.
The Start of Telegraphy

Ferris Institute was termed an opportunity school in part because Woodbridge Ferris took advantage of every opportunity to provide a curriculum to prepare people for nearly every wage-earning job.

The days were gone, according to W.N. Ferris, when a man could enter a railroad office and with a few suggestions from a busy operator acquire the necessary skills to become a telegraph operator.
African American Students at the Ferris Institute

As a result of the research efforts of David Pilgrim and Franklin Hughes we now know the extraordinary story of Woodbridge Ferris, his relationship with the Hampton institute, and his success in bringing African males to the Ferris Institute.

After their college preparatory education at Ferris these men went on the universities throughout the Midwest and became leaders in their fields.
The hospital for contagious diseases was established in 1918. It was equipped with 15 beds and intended especially for Ferris Institute students. When Big Rapids’ Mercy Hospital was destroyed by fire the facility served the entire community for several months.

The 1919 yearbook writes about the remarkable record of only one death in two years.
Thank you

For your commitment to innovation, exploration, creativity, and education.

Through your efforts you help carry on a great Ferris tradition.

And in doing so you help the Ferris State University of today become the institution we need to become for tomorrow.

David L. Eisler
president