

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

HISTORICAL FIGURES

As a boy, **Rob Firmin, AM'71, PhD'78**, loved to take in the view from the family's Buick station wagon as it crested a 30-foot overpass—the highest point anywhere near his small Ohio hometown. He could see for miles across terrain as flat as a table. "Views of hills and valleys were always fascinating to me as a consequence," he remembers. He knew he would return to the West when a trip in the early '60s brought him face to face with huge mountains and cavernous valleys.

Firmin stayed in Ohio through college, earning his double major in history and art history at Denison University. Paul R. Ehrlich's 1968 *The Population Bomb* focused him. He did not agree that the fight for human survival would essentially be over by the early '70s, but he concluded that population growth multiplied by consumption is the greatest threat to civilization. He applied to the University of Chicago to understand the crisis and hopefully contribute to addressing it.

Firmin studied demography under Philip Hauser, PhB'29, AM'33, PhD'38. His dissertation, "The Effect of Economic Conditions upon Differential Fertility in the United States, 1955–1970," introduced new analytic techniques to demography. Recognizing that academic research alone could not make the world more rational, he earned an MBA from Columbia to acquire skills in organization building and marketing.

After learning the ropes at IBM, Prime Computer, and a start-up, Firmin formed a company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to develop and market his rationality software. Javelin presents user-developed logic in its quantitative models from ten perspectives; it won many industry awards for innovation and was acquired in 1989.

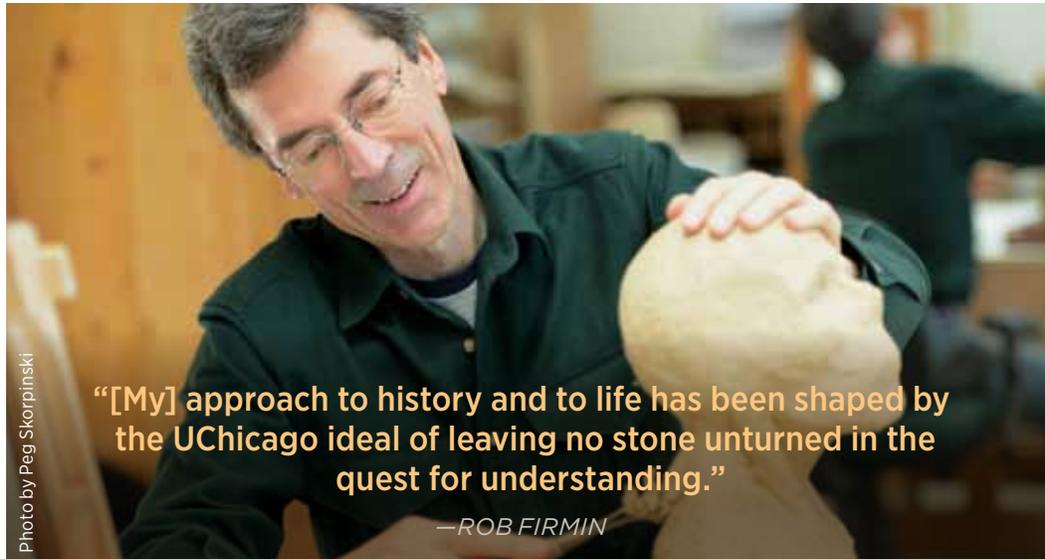


Photo by Peg Skorpinski

"[My] approach to history and to life has been shaped by the UChicago ideal of leaving no stone unturned in the quest for understanding."

—ROB FIRMIN

While developing other software concepts Firmin signed up for a class in sculpture, which had fascinated him since childhood. One day while reading a technical manual, he recalls, "I thought, 'People are not getting more rational; I'm going to inspire people to higher achievement by commemorating great ideas and great people, as a sculptor.'" Today, with his sculpting partner Eugene Daub, "one of America's great sculptors," he designs and creates public art, primarily about people, events, or ideals that he and Daub admire.

Their first joint commission was a nine-foot bronze of Thomas Jefferson founding the University of Virginia. They founded Daub & Firmin Sculpture Studios in 2005. Among the firm's best-known public projects are a sculpture near Abraham Lincoln's birthplace of the 16th president as a boy; a memorial to Julia Tuttle, founder of Miami, Florida; the allegories of civilization in Utah's state capitol rotunda; and a soon-to-be-unveiled sculpture of a national icon in the US Capitol.

Firmin lives with his wife, Eva Schiorring, in the hills of Kensington, California, next to Berkeley. Schiorring, a graduate of UC San Diego and Harvard, conducts research and

evaluations to improve student outcomes in California's community college system. When he's not sculpting, Firmin trains in swimming and running and nurtures an interest in astronomy—in particular, cosmology—which he says provides perspective on the human history that is so central to his work. He's also working on a book, *Equations of History: A New Approach to Historiography*.

Firmin says his approach to life has been shaped by the UChicago ideal of leaving no stone unturned in the quest for understanding. He has designated a bequest to benefit the Social Sciences Division, specifically the departments of sociology and history, that he hopes will enhance the University's leadership in interdisciplinary social sciences scholarship. "I chose to make my bequest known with the hope that it will assist the University's ability to plan its financial future. Chicago is a unique university, among the greatest—an intellectual powerhouse that contributes to the present and future betterment of humanity to a degree far beyond its size. It is unpretentious and we must guarantee its excellence."

TO READ MORE ABOUT ROB FIRMIN,
VISIT giftplanning.uchicago.edu.