Sir Walter had the vision to perceive that his gift would make a necessary and vital impact on the development of South Australia and its people.
Hughes, Sir Walter Watson (1803-1887) was a grazier, mine-owner and sea captain – but he is most remembered for his exceptional generosity and public spirit.

Gifts have played a fundamental role in the University of Adelaide’s development from its early beginnings more than 130 years ago.

In 1872, Sir Walter Watson Hughes gave £20,000 to a fledgling Adelaide college – an immense gift which so exceeded the college’s expectations, it decided to found a university.

So the University of Adelaide came into being in 1874, giving the 38-year-old colony of South Australia the nation’s third university.

Hughes, a former sea captain who made his fortune when copper was discovered on his property at Wallaroo, is known as the ‘Founding Father’ of the University, his gift inspiring many other donors through the years.

Hughes’ generosity set in motion a great legacy: the University of Adelaide now has over 100,000 graduates to date, over 100 Rhodes Scholars and five Nobel Laureates, and is among Australia’s leading universities. Hughes showed great vision in helping to establish the University, but even he could not have known the absolute breadth and depth of the achievements the University has seen.

Today, Hughes’ statue sits at the front of the Mitchell Building on the University’s North Terrace campus, overlooking the vibrant everyday life of the institution he helped to establish.

From Hughes’ first act of generosity, donations and bequests have played a critical role in the University’s development. The public spirit and benevolence that Hughes embodied lives on in the donors and bequestors who support the University of Adelaide today.

The Hughes Bequest Society

From a proud past to a bright future – the University of Adelaide is grateful to all of those people who, like Sir Walter Watson Hughes, understand the difference that an education can make for both individuals and the broader community.

The University of Adelaide greatly appreciates the generosity of friends and alumni who remember the University in their will, and would like to acknowledge their very special contributions through the Hughes Bequest Society.

Named in honour of Sir Walter Watson Hughes, the Society recognises the enduring and visionary support of these benefactors within their own lifetime.

Members of the Hughes Bequest Society receive a membership pin and certificate, and gain access to a range of benefits in recognition of their commitment – from exclusive events and presentations to updates on University news and special offers.

The Hughes Bequest Society welcomes all supporters who have chosen to leave a bequest to the University of Adelaide. If you have planned a gift to the University, we encourage you to let us know about it. This will give us an opportunity to recognise your intentions during your lifetime.

Join a community of people who share a respect for learning and a commitment to the future by becoming a member of the Hughes Bequest Society.