Welcome

Good afternoon. Happy University Day, the 221st birthday of American public higher education.

It is such a pleasure to share this day with North Carolina’s Governor, Pat McCrory. One of the first people to welcome me last year, together we have built a very strong and collaborative relationship. Thank you, Governor McCrory for joining us on University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s historic birthday.

I would also like to extend my greetings to our distinguished guests, members of the platform committee, faculty, students, staff, alumni, community members and legislators. We are proud to have you with us. This is a day when we celebrate the legacy of public higher education and its impact our state, and we are doubly honored to have not only our current Governor, but also former Governor and UNC alumnus Jim Hunt, who will be receiving a distinguished alumnus award today.

To our students here today – it is wonderful to see you – I want you to know that no other university in America has had a longer, closer and more enduring bond with its home state and her Governors.

It is a special privilege to welcome and thank you both on behalf of the entire Carolina community.

Carolina’s beginnings and long partnership with the state

Just a year ago on this day, I was given the honor of my life when I was installed as the 11th Chancellor. Now, 365 days later, I can honestly say, the more that I have learned, the prouder I have become of Carolina; the more people I have met, the commitment, the service and truly outstanding research I have seen, and the explosive talent and potential of our students, makes me have great optimism about our future.

Today, on our birthday, when we celebrate our history we also forecast our future. On Oct. 12, 1793, William Richardson Davie, a Revolutionary War officer and a statesman, laid the cornerstone of Old East. Our first building was the nation’s first public university building.

In that historic moment, he anchored this place to North Carolina soil and guaranteed a future we live now. Think of it - with daring vision, Gov. Davie looked into a wilderness, literally a forest at the top of a hill, and he saw a university.

He introduced an idea, a revolutionary idea, of a public university created for the people of North Carolina, to lawmakers just as the state officially joined the brand new nation in 1789. His vision, created a future that mirrored the ideals of our nation’s new democracy, and that vision
has been expanded by every person who has walked our campus and resulted in one of our state’s most treasured and valuable institutions.

From Gov. Davie onward, every North Carolina governor has walked these campus pathways, whether as student, parent, trustee or distinguished guest. They have honored our University at University Day or Commencement and celebrated our teaching, research and service with us.

These leaders and North Carolina’s historical investment is with us whenever we walk these brick paths or take a few minutes to soak in the beauty of McCorkle Place. And our history, built from a dream that came out of war and rose from the wilderness, can be felt still in trees on our campus that were here long before Old East.

**Carolina grows through the 20th century**

Throughout our history, other visionaries have seen futures for us that shaped revolutionary paths – from 1919 to 1930, a period spanning historic global turmoil, coming out war, the roaring 20’s, depression – UNC’s President Harry Chase – guided Carolina to national prominence as an exemplar of the modern university. He saw what others did not – he did not give into despair, but guided us to a prominent future.

As our own visionary historian Jim Leloudis said in the wonderful article on Chaise in the alumni magazine – “In terms of the intellectual life of the University and its place nationally, Chase was the most important actor in the early 20th century.” And Frank Porter Graham — who was mentored by and then succeeded President Chase — credited Chase with leading “the greatest material expansion and intellectual advance” and How? By gathering the momentum of the past, adding values of the present and making a new synthesis.

And the history he created still drives the future we live.

**Writing Carolina’s next chapter**

With one brick, Gov. Davie dreamed us into being. With a few more bricks (President Chase’s building campaign was very large), President Chase raised the bar on higher education learning and created the modern research university in Chapel Hill.

In a wonderful article by Olivia Hart (available online), we can trace other historical figures who saw something others did not see, took action, and shaped a new future for us all:

- 1898 – Sallie Walker Stockard as the 1st woman to receive a degree from Carolina (not allowed to attend commencement);
- 1929 – Henry Owl – the 1st American Indian to be admitted to Carolina;
- 1951 – Oscar Diggs, entered our medical school and became its 1st black graduate.

Today, we are living the next chapter of our visionary’s dreams.
This year, for example, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Carolina Covenant Scholars Program, a farsighted program, to give highly qualified low-income students the chance to graduate debt free. I recently spent time with two Covenant Scholars who have graduated and established themselves in successful careers. Now, they are putting their parents through college.

And this year, Carolina was recognized nationally as the most economically diverse of all public universities, also the direct result of dreams and commitments by many leaders here and across the state.

The delight of discovery

Our early leaders could not have imagined the ways in which we would change and grow but they created the opportunity for it to happen. Opportunity isn’t a crystal ball – we can’t say for sure what’s in store when we provide it – but opportunity can turn someone’s flicker to a flame, and that is the true cornerstone of our history.

They couldn’t envision the tremendous expansion of health affairs on our campus that is truly a light on the hill for so many North Carolinians. Or that people, like Marcia Machado Perritt, from our School of Government would be helping governments in North Carolina’s 100 counties every day.

The concept of nanotechnology was far beyond their dreams, but today the Carolina Institute is an international leader in NanoMedicine – creating marvelous new cures. They couldn’t have predicted that chemistry Professor Tom Meyer, Director of the Solar Fuels institute here would share a $1 million prize for his innovative research on alternative fuels. They couldn’t envision the power of a student who gives back, like Valerie Ashby, a North Carolina born-and-bred chemist who is changing the face STEM education and who as our Faculty Marshal, led our processional today.

Nor, I expect could they have imagined how far Carolina’s mission would extend beyond the old well; or that our graduates would create new international businesses and countless jobs; that Journalism professor Steven King and students in his mobile app class would answer the call of Liberia’s Minister of Information to put their new media talents to work to create a resource for accurate, real-time information about the Ebola crisis in Liberia.

Finally, I doubt the could have imagined how essential our dedicated staff are to making our campus tick in every single way - their expert care, commitment and love of our students is essential to helping our students and faculty prepare for a future with limitless possibilities.

Clearly, Tar Heels don’t waste time. By celebrating our history today we are reaffirming our own commitment to seeing an as yet unformed future – and in this way we honor their legacy.

Facing challenges with courage

Thank you Gov. McCrory for your remarks and presence here with us today. And thank you all for joining us to celebrate the founding of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Today, as we reflect on the past and look to the future, we also must acknowledge that the present isn’t perfect. It never is. We have and always will continue to face challenges. But, if as a community, we face them with courage and creativity, they can become our greatest opportunities, and we will honor lessons from our founders as we dream our future.

Charting our future

The challenge I want accept today on our behalf – the brick I believe we want to add in our own time - is to create a history as meaningful, game-changing, and life-affirming, as the one that came before.

Earlier this year I cut the ribbon on the dedication of Marsico Hall, our newest state-of-the-art research building. This beautiful new facility was made possible thanks to the financial commitment of the General Assembly and the people of North Carolina. But as Steve Jobs said, technology is not enough, it flourishes most when blended with other forms of learning. He said, “it is technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that makes our hearts sing”.

And, that blending, I would add, is Carolina’s special distinction, and it is the way we create a dynamic future and make the impossible possible. It was Davie’s dream, and Chase’s dream. It’s mine, too. And, I hope it’s yours.

The history we make together will be the future our community lives.