

James Madison University Centennial Convocation

March 14, 2008

President Rose's Remarks

It was about 10:30 on the night of March 10, 1908. Most of the people of Harrisonburg were in their homes and many had gone to bed. Suddenly a blaze of light illuminated part of the darkened business district on South Main Street. Lights shone out from top to bottom of the new *News-Register* building at the corner of Newman and Main.

The quietness of the night was shattered by a prolonged blast of the town fire whistle. Curious citizens jumped from bed. Many people picked up their telephones to ask the switchboard operator what had happened. Then they heard the news. Harrisonburg had gotten the Normal! The General Assembly had finally passed the bill providing for the establishment of a Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg.

And so it all began 100 years ago this week. Senator Keezell, the "Tall Sycamore of Cub Run," as the six-foot-six giant of a senator from Rockingham was sometimes called, had won an important victory for Harrisonburg in the senate of the General Assembly. Curiously, just as this year, the General Assembly had not finished its session on time!

1908 was a time of optimism. Thomas Edison proclaimed in 1908 that "anything, everything, is possible." In fact, according to the Smithsonian's research, "the events and innovations that occurred...a century ago marked, in many ways, America's entry

into the modern world.” The Normal was part of that flurry of our country’s “genius and resourcefulness.”

With the action of the General Assembly and the authorization of Governor Claude Swanson in 1908, the seed was planted, and today it has blossomed into what we know as James Madison University.

What would John Wayland, Cornelius Heatwole, and Yetta Shoninger, President Burruss’s first three faculty hires think of us today? Could they have possibly imagined that their Normal School would become an enterprise of over 3.8 million square feet and 150 buildings on 675 acres with 100 degree programs? That it would enroll almost 18,000 students, that it would have conferred over 100,000 degrees, and employ over 2,400 faculty and staff.

What would Nannie Sword of Lee County, the first of the 150 young ladies in the inaugural class think about the university of today? I can assure you that her parents could not have imagined that the cost of their daughter’s education in Harrisonburg would have escalated from the \$6.00 for tuition per year and \$14.00 a month for room and board to today’s annual charge of \$13,500!

This institution has had as many names as presidents-five. We were The Normal and Industrial School for Women; the State Normal School for Women; the State Teachers College at Harrisonburg; Madison College; and thereafter James Madison University.

Governor Kaine, at least while I am president, you will not have a proposal for a name change!

At the beginning of the 20th century, Julian Burruss, the first president of the College, turned legislation into the reality of a college campus. Samuel Duke, who followed as the second president, was known as the “builder” of academic programs and facilities. Tyler Miller led the college into a new era of co–education. For more than 27 years, Ronald Carrier transformed the institution from a state teachers college to a comprehensive university of national prominence. Each president has had a profound and positive impact on the development of the university. Each has contributed to its success, and by any measure JMU is a success.

When I became president almost ten years ago, I was the recipient of a wonderful gift – an institution that was in excellent shape! My only challenge was opportunity, and what to make of it.

I am grateful to a dedicated faculty, a bright and loyal student body, a highly competent administrative staff who gave me what I inherited, and I am grateful to Ron Carrier for his mentorship and leadership. I would like to ask Ron to come forward because I have a gift for him, and it is given with both respect and gratitude. Fifty years ago this would have been a photo album or scrap book, today it is a digital collection of what I hope are your fond memories from 1971 to 1998. We hope that you and Edith will enjoy it.

Leaders are important: they establish direction, build support, get the job done and celebrate accomplishment. As Michael Gartner, a noted journalist has commented, “No

college prospers, no museum blossoms, no army wins, no sports team triumphs, no causes advance without strong leadership.”

But it takes much more to create sustained success. I coined a phrase 10 years ago about a characteristic that I think is uniquely JMU: **All Together One**. As a label, it seems to have gained some sense of acceptance and permanence. It was borrowed from the Latin on our currency, *e pluribus unum*, or, “from many, one.”

The term represents a spirit, a character, an approach, that transcends leaders. It describes a culture in which the actors value excellence, mutual respect, and integrity and in which collaboration rules the day. Other colleges or universities may talk about it, we live it. Just ask SRI why they wanted to locate their east coast presence here in Harrisonburg/Rockingham County with James Madison University.

Our national recognitions, our popularity with admissions applicants, our 93 percent satisfaction rating from current students, and our “Be The Change” graduates who are making this world a better place in which to live and work are the products of the collective efforts of thousands of faculty and staff who have served this fine University. To those who have passed, to those who are now enjoying retirement and to those who are still making a difference everyday, let me say “thank you” on this very special occasion.

Governor Kaine, at this our Centennial, I am proud that we are a university comprised of scholars responsible for the discovery and transfer of knowledge. We expose, challenge, nurture and cultivate the mind. We inspire a love for learning and inquiry. We

question, seek truth, and solve problems. We do all of these with the goal of creating educated and enlightened citizens. As a Virginia public university, we do it for the common good, and we have done it for 100 years.

Reference: Rasenberger, J. (2007). *America 1908*. New York: Simon and Schuster.