It is a pleasure to welcome you here today on this historic occasion when we observe the 75th anniversary of the dedication of the alumni building.

I want to begin by thanking our history task force which is ably chaired by Harry Dempsey. I’d like us to recognize Harry and the members of this group. Special thanks go Karen Blanzy, Mary Kay Maclver and Jennifer Thede for their extraordinary hard work on the project. Thanks also go to Larry Martin, Melinda McMartin and Patty Terryn for their help and support.

Most everyone knows the story of the great fire in 1950 that destroyed Old Main and how Ferris rose like a Phoenix from those ashes. Such is also the story for the Alumni Building which we celebrate today. On June 16th, 1928, a little over three months after the death of founding father, Woodbridge Ferris, a fire destroyed the Music Building, athletic dressing rooms and cafeteria. A desire to memorialize the contributions of Mr. Ferris together with a need to replace this lost space were initial reasons behind the campaign to build the alumni building.

By the time of its dedication on this very day 75 years ago, the Alumni Building had become even more of a symbol for the future of Ferris Institute. Ferris’ handpicked successor Gerritt Masselink died less than thirteen months after his mentor, a death some believed was hastened by his efforts to ensure funding for this very building.

Consider the circumstances, in less than thirteen months Ferris Institute, a proprietary institution, had lost both of these leaders. In this context the building itself was a symbol of the dedication of the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community to preserve and continue the school. News accounts of the time describe how faculty and staff sold bricks, 6 bricks for $5 or 12 bricks for $10, to help raise funds for this construction.

The dedication brought 13 of the original alumni of Ferris Institute back to the campus. Constructed at a cost of $125,000, the building was considered state-of-the-art. In addition to its new classrooms, the building also featured a gymnasium, dressing rooms and showers for men and women.
Despite the obstacles and setbacks it had faced, on this day back in 1929 the future of Ferris seemed bright and secure. Just ten days later the stock market would crash and the challenges of the Great Depression would grow and mount. The institution was forced to make great sacrifices. I have with me the 1930 copy of the Crimson and Gold, the campus yearbook. After that publication was suspended. There were times in the great depression of the 30’s when the enrollment was so low that the heat was shut off in some of the rooms of Alumni’s neighboring Old Main building.

Even though hard times would follow, for 20 years the Alumni Building was the pride of the Institute. Thousands of students attended classes, participated in and went to athletic events in the Alumni Building. The building also served as the location for the institute’s convocation ceremonies and concerts.

With this construction the campus would be unchanged until the 1950’s. After fire destroyed Old Main in 1950, the building took on even more significance as THE prominent architectural representation of the institute.

In the 1950’s, the Alumni Building became increasingly obsolete. A new gymnasium in the much larger Health and Physical Education Building, now the Student Rec Center, opened just before Christmas in 1963, and the university’s center moved forever away from the northeast corner of campus.

Today, however, on this 75th anniversary it is good to look back on this venerable building and to salute its place in our history. In doing so celebrate the lives of those visionary leaders who worked together to create this building and of the faculty, staff, and students who have actively pursued learning in it.

Perhaps in his own words, Woodbridge Ferris summed this up best –

*Education is life.*

David L. Eisler
10/15/2004