



UAF photo by JR Ancheta

A vision

By Sam Bishop

The convergence of two events 100 years ago in Fairbanks set the stage for a unique day of centennial celebrations at UAF this past summer.

Back in 1915, Alaska's territorial delegate to Congress, James Wickersham, spent July 4 dedicating a cornerstone for the college he hoped would be built here. The following two days, Wickersham met with indigenous chiefs from the Tanana River region.

One hundred years later, on July 6, the university staged a reconvergence by rededicating the cornerstone and celebrating an initiative to honor Alaska's Native peoples and anchor indigenous studies in a new center. These were the first major public events leading up to the 2017 centennial commemoration of the university's formal establishment by the territorial legislature in 1917.

The day began at Troth Yeddha' Park, which takes its title from the Athabascan name for the ridge on which the university sits. Hundreds of people gathered to hear leaders speak about the significance of the park and center.

"Today we celebrate coming together as a community and working side by side," said Evon Peter '98, vice chancellor for rural, community and Native education and a former Arctic Village chief.



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At top, speakers and participants in the July 6, 2015, events gather by the cornerstone. From left are: **Sindy Mendez-Espino '15, Wally Carlo, Annette Freiburger '13, Sam Enoka '95, Nancy James '05, Trimble Gilbert, Anna Frank, Aaron Schutt, Doug Goering '84, Jo Heckman '79, '85, John Coghill, Mike Sfraga '84, '97, Howard Hornbuckle, Byron Mallott, Scott Jepsen, John Eberhart, Brian Rogers, Steve Mitchell '89, '06, Evon Peter '98, John Davies '70, '75, Karl Kassel and Ethan Schutt.**

Below, Fairbanks residents and visitors gather at the wooden box used to cast the cornerstone in 1915. From left, are: **unknown, A.J. "Tony" Nordale, Frances Carpenter, J.L. McPherson, Dr. R.R. Myers, Harry E. St. George and Berkley Manford.**

“We celebrate UAF’s commitment to Native education and their plans to build [an] indigenous studies center ... which will bring [us] together in a way which will be a foundation for our future advocacy and research for the benefit of our tribes.” — Victor Joseph, Tanana Chiefs Conference president



UAF photo by J.R. Archera

unfolding

After the Troth Yeddha’ event, the crowd walked from the park to Cornerstone Plaza for the rededication. The day was hot, as it was for 1915’s dedication.

Alaska Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott, UA Regent Jo Heckman ’79, ’85 and several others spoke about the university’s value to the state. Chancellor Brian Rogers said the university provides a foundation for progress in Alaska, and the cornerstone symbolizes that role.

“The cornerstone represents hopes, reminds us of the audacity and fortitude of the people who started this university 100 years ago, dreaming one day that their children and children’s children would have a place where free thinking, exploration and inquiry would enrich their lives,” Rogers told the crowd. “So may this cornerstone also represent our commitment to those ideals as the university enters its second century, and to that purpose I hereby rededicate our cornerstone at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.”

Web extra: See more photos from the rededication event at www.uaf.edu/aurora/.



Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, 1905-1917, UAF-1989-166-384-Print, Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

At top, participants in the July 6, 2015, ceremony at Troth Yeddha’ Park enjoy a traditional Athabascan dance after the speeches. They include, from left, Travis Cole; Jerry Isaac, former Tanana Chiefs Conference president; Victor Joseph, current TCC president; and Evon Peter ’98, UAF vice chancellor for rural, community and Native education. The Rev. Trimble Gilbert of Arctic Village is at far right.

Below, chiefs from the Tanana region gather for a portrait in 1915 while in Fairbanks for meetings with James Wickersham and other federal officials. Seated in front, from left, are Chief Alexander of Tolovana, Chief Thomas of Nenana, Chief Evan of Koschakat and Chief Alexander William of Tanana. Standing at rear, from left, are Chief William of Tanana, Paul Williams of Tanana, and Chief Charlie of Minto.

On this page, clockwise from right: Poldine Carlo '01H* (left) and Anna Frank, both of Fairbanks, enjoy a moment at the ceremony at Troth Yeddha' Park. Carlo spoke at the ceremony, recalling the university's long record of serving Alaska Native students. While attending the boarding high school in Eklutna, Carlo took a home economics class from Flora Jane Harper, who in 1935 had become the university's first Alaska Native graduate. "I was so proud of her," Carlo told the crowd.

Alaska's Territorial Delegate James Wickersham reads his speech at the dedication of the cornerstone on July 4, 1915. Wickersham gave a lengthy account of the passage of the federal act through which Congress granted land to the future Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines in March of that year.

Steve Mitchell '89, '06 re-enacts excerpts from Wickersham's 1915 speech. Mitchell said he would not deliver the entire original oration — to do so would require at least an hour. "Judge Wickersham was a man of foresight, but he was not a man of few words," Mitchell quipped.

*H=honorary degree



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"We who are gathered here today do most solemnly dedicate these grounds and this cornerstone to the everlasting support of the principles of free government, free speech and free schools for which our forefathers fought." — Territorial Delegate James Wickersham in a 1915 speech re-enacted by Steve Mitchell



Wickersham Collection, Alaska State Library

“This university really has become a cornerstone of our community and of the state of Alaska, a success arising from the dedication of countless individuals.”

— Chancellor Brian Rogers



Above, Chancellor Brian Rogers speaks to the crowd at Cornerstone Plaza before rededicating the university's cornerstone on July 6. Many in the audience took advantage of the shade offered by the buildings surrounding the plaza, escaping sunshine that sent the temperature to 88 degrees. The heat was a fitting feature for the day; on the day of the cornerstone's original dedication, July 4, 1915, the temperature in Fairbanks hit 83 degrees, according to National Weather Service records.

At right, Howard Luke '96H* enjoys having an “elder selfie” taken by Travis Cole before the ceremony at Troth Yeddha' Park. Luke, who turns 92 this year, was born at Linder Lakes, downriver from Nenana, but has lived at the Chena village site on the Tanana River's south bank near Fairbanks since 1937. In recent decades, he has taught traditional Athabascan lifestyle skills and beliefs.

