

Ralph Bunche and William Field speak at the commencement exercises at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Alaska on May 22, 1961

Series title: University of Alaska Fairbanks commencement addresses and exercises

00-00-10

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UAF 1961 Commencement ceremonies

May 22, 1961

Sections of the recording are difficult to understand

Opening prayer

William R. Wood greets guests and students. It is the 39th commencement for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He introduces the speaker for the day, William Osgood Field, a glaciologist and geographer.

William Field talked about visiting the university in 1927 when it was the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. He said as an Outsider it was always exciting to be associated with Alaska. He came to Alaska with the military as a member of the Cold Weather Test Attachment. He talked about the changes in glaciers during the last few centuries. He talked about studying the glaciers and hoped for a better way of predicting future changes in the climate. He talked about first reading about glaciers in 1926 and the prediction of glacier activity in Glacier Bay. He observed and photographed glaciers in Glacier Bay and returned periodically to record changes. They worked in cooperation with the American Geographical Society. They also worked with the American Geophysical Union. He also talked about the International Geophysical Year. It was a chance for scientists from different nations to work together.

One of the principal things they have observed in glaciers in Alaska has been receding glaciers. There are exceptions. It raises many questions. They are still in a period of observation. He talked about disappearing glaciers on the east slope of the St. Elias Mountains in the Fairweather Range. On the West slope of the range the glaciers have been advancing during the same period. He talked about the McCarty Glacier on the Kenai Peninsula receding miles. Glaciers in the Prince William Sound have been advancing. The Hubbard Glacier has advanced about a mile since 1890. Behavior of glaciers is a mystery but also presents problems. The Taku Glacier prevents Juneau from connecting to the Alaska Highway and there are other problems. Fairbanks was not covered by glaciers during the last ice age but advancing glaciers could affect the Richardson Highway and the railroad system. He talked about the problems that glaciers could pose to transportation. Advancing glaciers will happen again. He hopes that research into glacier activity will be increased.

Dr. Wood introduced Ralph J. Bunche, undersecretary at the United Nations. Dr. Ralph J. Bunche talked about the significance of graduation. He talked about the role of the individual in achieving peace, the Cold War and the increasing disparity between nations in the world. He discussed the United Nations and its efforts to maintain peace in the world.