

Good afternoon,

Back in the 1790s there was a series of Yellow Fever epidemics that ravaged the eastern seaboard. Tens of thousands of lives were lost, including several thousand in Baltimore. This, in a city whose population totaled only about 40,000 at the time. It was devastating. A small group of medical doctors were attempting to understand the cause of these epidemics. Two of them, Drs. Nathaniel Potter and John Davidge, began lobbying for the founding of a medical college in Baltimore that would not only solve these mysteries, but would educate and train doctors to care for the citizens of Baltimore and the State of Maryland.

By connecting medical study with a formal, classical education, they hoped to elevate the stature of the physician and separate themselves from the prevailing quackery of their era. The medical profession was only beginning to regulate itself, and physicians found themselves competing for patients with street-corner apothecaries, barber-surgeons, and even members of the clergy.

These were tough times. The average life expectancy was only 34 years when taking into account a 30-percent infant mortality rate. Treatments for disease were very crude - procedures such as bleeding, purging, and cupping were commonly employed. Patients were prescribed mercury arsenic to help battle illness.

Establishing a medical college would be no easy task. There was opposition to their teaching methods. Instruction was controversial. The doctors needed cadavers to teach anatomy, but the act donating one's body to science ran contrary to religious beliefs. As a consequence, they were forced to turn to the black market - to grave robbing. This often placed both instructor and student in harm's way.

In December 1807, a state charter was granted to this group of physicians, but there was stiff opposition to public financing for their campus. There was too much opposition. The State Legislature consented to a lottery to help fund the project, but revenues proved to be meager. Four years after the school's founding—having taught mostly out of their own homes—the doctors pursued their only remaining option, to fund construction with their own resources. They found a true ally in Colonel John Eager Howard. He owned this parcel of land we stand on today, then known as Lunds Lot. A lover of science, Howard turned down several generous offers from potential buyers, not only agreeing to sell it to the doctors at a reduced price, but allowing them to settle up when they had the money. On April 7, 1811, the foundation stone was laid, and on the final Monday in October 1812, at a cost of just under \$40,000, the first-floor lecture hall opened for instruction. The deed to the property would not be executed until May 1815.

These were men with a bold vision. Imagine, just two years after graduating their first class of five students in 1810, they opened a building that could accommodate 200 students in each lecture hall. To be honest, as industrious as these visionaries were, I don't think even they could have envisioned a campus of this magnitude. It would bring them great joy to know that some 90 years after the school's founding, two Maryland graduates—Drs. Henry Carter and James Carroll—proved to be leaders in solving the mystery of yellow fever. Indeed the growth and success of all our professional schools here at the University of Maryland Baltimore would make our founders very proud. So today, in celebrating the beginning of a third century for their building, we honor these pioneers for their compassion, innovation, and tenacity in advancing the health sciences, as well as generations of alumni, faculty, and staff who shared the passion and followed in their footsteps.

Thank you for being here this afternoon.