

ROBERT BURTON HOUSE '16 is best known as the University's first chancellor, serving from 1945 to 1957, but this gives scant recognition to his 40-year career of service to the University.

Young Bob House first came to Chapel Hill in 1912 from Halifax County. By the time he received his A.B. degree four years later he was president of Phi Beta Kappa, a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece, editor of the Carolina Magazine, class poet, and winner of the Eben Alexander Prize in Greek. He completed work for a master's degree at Harvard before volunteering for service during World War I. After the war, and following a year as a public school teacher in Greensboro, he became an archivist, then secretary of the State Historical Commission in Raleigh before his final repatriation to Chapel Hill.

In 1926 he returned to become Secretary of the University. Eight years later he was named Dean of Administration, and his title was changed to Chancellor in 1945. As Dean and Chancellor he was credited with helping to start or rebuild 14 departments and schools. "I've seen it grow," he said of the University, "but I've seen it maintain its identity amid change." His own personality is indelibly stamped on that of the University where for more than four decades he served on its faculty and staff. For eight years following his retirement in 1957 he continued to teach English and classics.

As a spokesman for the University he traveled across the state and country to plead its case and speak its praises, greeting thousands of alumni and making new friends. A trademark on every occasion was his harmonica, on which he inevitably played a few favorite tunes. "I think every speaker ought to have a few notes," he'd quip.

His message to all listeners was fundamental—that education is the hallmark of progress for North Carolina, and that scholarship is a desirable goal for each student.

Robert B. House carried his message beyond the classroom and into the Sunday School room of the University Methodist Church, where he taught a Bible class for many years. "I am an incurable optimist," he said, "because I believe God rules the world on his own terms and not ours."

For his faithful and effective service as a teacher, administrator, University spokesman and entertainer, the University recognized him with an honorary doctorate in 1970. To that the General Alumni Association now proudly adds its Distinguished Service Medal.