On the occasion of its Silver Anniversary, Madam Chancellor, I take particular pleasure in presenting to you Ronald Baker, a man whose guidance and good counsel helped shape the founding and development of Simon Fraser University. First faculty member and first Director of Academic Planning, the educational design crafted under his stewardship laid the cornerstone for this University’s identity and unique presence. Twenty-five years later, Ronald Baker’s vision gives truth to Ruskin’s advice, “When we build, let us think that we build forever.”

Before emigrating to Canada from his London birthplace, Ronald Baker served in the Royal Air Force as a Navigator, Flying Controller and Disarmament Officer in World War II. He then entered the University of British Columbia, graduating in 1951 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree and in 1953 with a Master of Arts, both in English Language and Literature.

His academic career has been marked by pioneering achievements. At the University of British Columbia, he became in 1960 the first resident off-campus lecturer, living and teaching English in Prince George. After service at the Universities of Alberta and Victoria, he entered Simon Fraser University’s history as a signatory to the Macdonald Report, recommending the creation of a new post-secondary institution. Working from modest quarters on Dunsmaur Street, Ronald Baker led the drive to recruit the first department heads, later assuming leadership himself in the English Department.

Ronald Baker accepted a new challenge when he became the first President of the University of Prince Edward Island in 1969, a post he served with distinction for nine years. President Emeritus and the David MacDonald Stewart Professor of Canadian Studies in Prince Edward Island, Ronald Baker is now applying his intellectual energy to new pathfinding ventures as an advisor to the British Columbia Government on the development of degree-granting institutions in Prince George and the Fraser Valley.

For exemplary service to the Canadian academic community, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1978, received the Distinguished Member award from the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education in 1988, and has been recognized by honorary degrees from the Universities of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Mount Allison.

We bring Ronald Baker home today as an old friend and honoured mentor. In this setting on this day, Emerson’s saying comes to mind, “He builded better than he knew; the conscious stone to beauty grew.” We proudly acknowledge one of Simon Fraser University’s master builders. Madam Chancellor, in the name of the Senate of the University, I am privileged to present Ronald Baker for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.