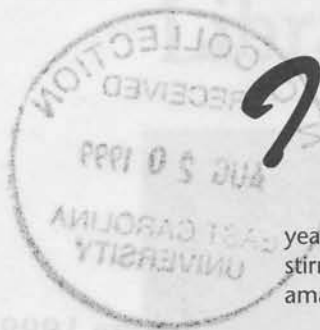


# From the President

Beverley Cass, President



I remember still reading Lancaster's *The Death of the Book* in 1985-86 while I was a doctoral student at Columbia University. It has taken me this entire day to recall his name. About 6:00 PM, it came to me that his last name was Lancaster. By about 7:00 or so, I knew that his first name began with the letter F. By 10:30 PM it occurs to me to look in the attic. Seems like I recall having filed away notes and things in a file cabinet in the attic from my time at Columbia in pursuit of the doctorate nearly 13 years ago. Maybe it will be there. In less than five minutes, I find it. I am stunned. It must have really stirred me up when I read it. To remember his name, to find the article, to even have kept it. I am pretty amazed. Must have really hit a nerve.

F. Wilfrid Lancaster, that's it. Lancaster. He's the guy who talked about the paperless society and questioned whether or not libraries would be needed in an electronic world. He thought that the profession (of librarianship) had its head in the sand if it continued to ignore this inevitable reality. His ideas haunted me. Could it be that I was spending all this energy working on a doctorate in library science only to have the whole darn profession disappear? Could he possibly be right? He was futuristic, even shocking.

It's accurate for me to say that Lancaster's ideas and what they might mean for libraries are ones that I have carried with me since first hearing them. It's almost been my mantra: prove him wrong, prove him wrong. I was reminded of Lancaster's predictions again last summer during ALA and the ACRL President's Program when North Carolina's own John Ulmschneider spoke of the future of the book. Another flash recall about what Lancaster said occurred again two months ago when Kem Ellis described his investigations into e-books and what this might mean for the services his public library might deliver. I was again reminded of the Lancaster prediction.

And then, it hit right here at home: the vortex of that intellectual storm has touched down right here at GTCC. Only two days ago, Technical Services Librarian Don Forbes told me that he had set counters on our library workstations to see what electronic resources were used most. Would it be NC LIVE, SIRS, Law Desk, the library's catalog, the Internet, or some other electronic resource? I'm afraid that Don's prediction that the least used item at the workstation will be our library's catalog may be correct. Apparently, Lancaster's predictions that have haunted me for 13 years are more accurate than I feared. Now I still do not believe that libraries will disappear during my career, and they may continue for a long time to come. But, I still worry.

I worry, too, about Intellectual Freedom and First Amendment rights and Internet filters and North Carolina Senate Bill 907. We've developed Internet Use Policies for our library. We don't worry too much about challenges to our resources or our access to the Internet here in our library. We're small; we're in the cloistered environment of academe. Yeah, right. Is it not enough to worry that Lancaster might still be right? Apparently not.

For today, right here at Guilford Technical Community College, it hits. The memo arrives addressed to Community College Presidents with this ominous disclaimer attached: Please note that while this report is not listed in the Annual Reporting Plan, we must respond to this Legislative request. Must respond? Respond about what? Respond to a survey designed to collect data about the impact and costs of adhering to Senate Bill 907 should it pass. Holy smoke. It asks about our policies concerning authorized or unauthorized access to the Internet by persons under the age of 18. It asks for how we supervise, monitor, make disclaimers for persons under 18. It asks how much it will cost us to use filtering software. Let us all hope that by the time this column appears in the next issue of *North Carolina Libraries*, the whole mess about Senate Bill 907 will have been swept away with some of the other debris of dead North Carolina Senate bills.

But that's not all I'm worried about. I'm really worried that Gene, Dr. Intellectual Freedom, Lanier is retiring. Late this afternoon, Gene completed the wording of a cover memo to accompany the proposed statement as it is distributed to Executive Board members. What will become of us? Who among us is prepared to take his place? Let us all hope, again, that by the time this column appears in print, NCLA will have adopted a statement on Internet access and filters.

I'm really worried, too, about what it must be like to be Jerry Thrasher, Director of the Cumberland County Public Library, and to have to wage his nearly never-ending defense of the principles of Intellectual Freedom and the role of library in the community.

Holy, holy smoke. All these worries in just one short week. I worried all day about these things. And then I worried that a colleague of mine told me today that I worry too much. Well, bah humbug, someone must worry about these things. Please, let these worries, though, be just another few of those several million things out there that I worry about all the time. And, please, give us all the strength to continue to wage the battles for libraries and Intellectual Freedom. May we find the way through these things. May the strong and brave among us be stronger and braver still.