

# Libraries, Foundations, and the 1980's

Thomas Lambeth

I am pleased to be here because libraries are important. Libraries are important everywhere, but certainly no where more important than on the campus of a research university. A research university, located in a center of intellectual ferment such as the Triangle, demands a library of the quality and the size which D. H. Hill has realized.

Your gathering here tonight is, however, more than a celebration of the attainment of a new milestone in the development of this facility. It is also a recognition of the importance of the kind of support that organizations such as the Friends of the Library provide to a valuable educational resource.

My former boss, Rich Preyer, told me some time ago about going to a party at the White House. It was one of those evenings that was given over to recognizing achievement in the arts. He noticed Erskine Caldwell, famous author, standing on one side of the room by himself and went over to speak to him. To start up a conversation, he turned to Caldwell and said: "Mr. Caldwell, what are you writing these days?" To which Caldwell replied, "Checks."

I hope it is not too crass of me to point out that to some extent tonight is an occasion on which we say thank you to those who write checks. Fortunately, there have been people willing to provide financial support for the strengthening of this library. Even more fortunately, however, this library has not had to depend alone upon large foundations or state appropriations or big bequests. There have been individuals of varying degrees of affluence who have been willing to share some of their money in support of D. H. Hill. That kind of broad base is critical to the development of such an institution.

Why are libraries important? Why is it important that a public library receive private funds? What does all of this have to do with foundations? What does it have to do with the United States of the 1980's? It is those questions that I want to address in the next few minutes.

Thomas Carlyle described the true college as "a collection of books" and Milton wrote that "Books are not absolutely dead things but contain a potency of life in them to be as active as the soul whose progeny they are."

It seems to me that in those words are captured the spirit of places such as this. Books are the pockets in which we place ideas and universities bring those ideas and people together. From that confrontation comes most of what is beautiful and valuable in our lives. So it is fair to say that the support which an institution gives to the expansion of its library is one of the truest measures of its commitment to the ideal of liberal education and to its purpose of enabling free men and women to make good use of their freedom.

This institution can be proud of the commitment which it has demonstrated, and those who are its friends can be encouraged by the intelligence with which this institution and its library have approached this point in their development. Book inflation has been a far more devastating economic fact for libraries than it has been for our society as a whole. You, here, have shown imagination in your efforts to gain control of costs through those measures you have taken to deal with duplication and overlapping services, and with the establishment of cooperative ventures with other libraries in the Triangle.

There are those who would argue with the premise that private sources—whether they be individuals, corporations, or foundations should provide funds to a part of a public institution. Why, they say, should private money be used to build up a facility that can rely on all the taxpayers for its support?

Most of you know that the answer is very simple. The support of any level of government, however generous, is going to be only sufficient to provide the essentials—to keep things going. Private giving is the margin of excellence. So we—in the private foundation world—have much to gain by concerning themselves with the future of libraries and universities such as this. At the foundation I direct, which has a mandate to spend its money for the benefit of the people of North Carolina, we are especially interested in your future. And I hope you are interested in ours. This is the point where I make my plug for foundations.

There are places in the world where private philanthropy has a bad name—where it is considered bad for institutions or individuals to be indebted in any way to wealth. Indeed, in some of the nations of Western Europe legislation in recent years has discouraged the establishment of foundations. Several years ago when the King of Sweden proposed to endow a worthy activity, much of his nation's press and leadership was aroused to say that he should leave charity to the government, where it belonged. We have not come to that point in our country. We have a healthy respect for the role of both the private and the public sector in helping people when they need help.

Our danger is not from any government attitude but from the economic realities of life. Present law requires foundations each year to spend a sum equal to five percent of their asset value or all of their annual income, whichever is larger. Fortunately, the yield of most foundations is greater than five percent so they can pay out their annual income and need not dip into assets. But in a time of ten to twelve percent inflation and with a law that prevents foundations from putting some of their annual income aside to build up assets, foundation funds in real dollars are actually diminishing. In the last ten years the actual real dollar value of foundation assets has declined between \$3 billion to \$5 billion.

This year we are trying to change that law to provide that we pay out five percent, but may retain any earnings above that amount to build up the corpus of foundations. This may mean, temporarily, that there will be a small decline in foundation grants. It will mean, however, that foundations will go on existing and will grow so that over the long run those who benefit from them will gain.

I hope those of you here tonight will support these efforts because I think the private-public mix in our society is good. It is good in education and it is good in providing for the other needs of our people. That mix is good in our society generally because it prevents dominance by any one interest—a constant threat to our kind of democracy. It has been good for institutions such as this library which are a part of our arts and humanities treasure as Americans. Our progress in those fields in the last decade has been characterized by a national commitment to partnership that may be threatened by new directions in the federal government and by people who generally believe in the value of such institutions.

Budget cutting—whether in Raleigh or Washington—is always a dangerous time because it requires that a divergent group of people with different values must establish priorities for all of us. It is still the best system around, but it is not perfect.

Most Americans believe in the effort to control government spending, but I hope that consensus will not be used as a cover to do injury to basic values in our federal system. It is important that there be a full debate as to what is appropriate in government support programs.

It seems appropriate to me to give some attention to this subject tonight because, surely, libraries are associated with the learning and the preservation of values. The setting of national priorities is surely a question of values.

From the President on down we have heard in recent weeks the suggestion that nothing truly important will be lost by cutting back on funds for education, the arts, or the humanities because traditionally the private sector has supported those and will be the inevitable salvation of all of them.

It isn't necessarily so.

First, the private sector *has* been supportive long before the establishment of the national endowments or before the inauguration of massive educational assistance programs. But, support in terms of needs and in terms of ability to provide support was disappointing and geographically restricted. Anyone who believes that there would be arts councils in Pamlico and Stokes counties today if it had not been for the push of federal and state funds must also believe that deregulation of natural gas will not increase the price to the consumer.

If all the foundation grants made in America last year were lumped together they would not cover projected cuts in the field of education alone. If corporate contributions—which rose only four percent last year—were to rise ten percent this year, they would not cover the cuts proposed in public broadcasting and the two national endowments. Perhaps the greatest contribution of federal support in these areas has been—not the money—but the value of demonstrating a kind of national commitment to certain values.

During congressional hearings, Maurice Abravanel from Utah, a musician, was given 30 seconds to explain why the American people should support such things as libraries and symphonies. He said: "For the same reason that farmers plant flowers—because man cannot live without beauty."

For some years now we have given truth and beauty a limited national commitment but it has produced a great deal. In Winston-Salem, for example, one federal dollar has produced as much as 40 private dollars for programs in our community. And I can tell you that the Reynolds Foundation's money for various programs has resulted directly from the leveraging effect of federal and state funds committed to those programs.

It is very important that, as we make necessary sacrifices in taxpayer support of such things as the arts and the humanities, we are careful that we do not deliver the wrong messages about our priorities. I would probably be considered a hawk on defense, and I would have little argument with those who say we need to strengthen our country militarily. But, it does concern me that we spend \$600 per capita in this country on defense and only 70¢ on the arts. I am not certain I can justify \$52 million for military bands and only \$13 million for the National Endowment for the Arts music program. Let's not get into the posture where we say billions for defending America but pennies for what makes it worth defending.

There is another spirit that lurks among the budget cutters and among many of our people that should concern those of us here tonight. Last year a Cambridge survey produced the statistic that 28 percent of our people believe that science is bad. Other results of that survey reveal the beginnings of a fear of progress, of research, and of scientific inquiry. This may be relative. It is likely that people are afraid of science when they think of DNA research and proud of it when they watch the landing of the space shuttle. It is important that they realize the same spirit produced both.

There is a hint of another spirit which I find disturbing.

This nation and this state have always been committed to education. One reason for that has been the conviction, especially among the middle class, that education offers the means of making life better for their children. Today it is evident that many Americans doubt that. We have become a nation of pessimists, although the very idea of this country is optimistic.

We must restore our peoples' faith in our institutions. Here at a public insitution that is a special challenge. North Carolina State University belongs to everybody in North Carolina. It belongs to many who will never send their children there, who will never even visit—who may not be especially fond of it—but who own it along with every other citizen of the state. We need to be more concerned about our accountability to all these people. We need to demonstrate our respect for their ideas and their concerns—we need to be as solicitous of their minds and hearts as we are of their tax dollars. That need to let them know that they benefit—in a real day-by-day way from a research university and its library—is especially challenging.

One example: the amount of coal in the top kilometer of the earth's crust is estimated to be sufficient to last another 5,000 years if we maintain today's rate of use. If we continue to increase that rate only four percent a year, however, we'll use it up in only 138 years. The answers to how to deal with that kind of

problem are not going to leap out of the air. They involve research, they involve referral to the store of knowledge found in a place such as this. They do impact directly on the life of a saleslady in Burgaw and her children and her grandchildren. They need this place.

In summary: libraries are important, most of all because when they flourish free men are safe. They give a perspective to our national policy, they help us make right choices, they keep our vision to the future with a healthy respect for the past.

*Thomas Lambeth is Executive Director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Delivered at the North Carolina State University Friends of the Library dinner commemorating the acquisition of one million volumes by the D. H. Hill Library, April 21, 1981.*



## Joseph Ruzicka South, Inc.

### WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A BINDERY?

- Your collection deserves the binding excellence attained through 222 years experience.
- Certified by the Library Binding Institute, we offer you a choice.
- Select Class "A" binding or try our Superflex.
- Both are fully guaranteed in materials and workmanship.

### SERVICE, QUALITY, AND FAIR PRICES... THE RUZICKA WAY.

Come by for a personal tour of our facilities.  
Call or write for particulars.

911 Northridge Street • P. O. Box 21568 • Greensboro, North Carolina 27420  
Telephone (919) 299-7534

*An Equal Opportunity Employer*