

# Address to In-Service Training Committee Workshop

Lumberton, September 13, 1972

by Sam Ragan

Former Secretary

State Department of Art, Culture, and History

I want to tell you that I am very pleased to be asked to talk to such a wonderful group as this, but to warn you that my approach to speech making is very much like a story they tell in my native Granville County about the man who was traveling down a country road. He noticed on every barn door and fence post a target, and in the center of that target was a bullet hole. Presently he came upon a man with a rifle over his shoulder, and he stopped and asked the man if he had been doing all that shooting around there. The man said he had so the traveler said, "You must be about the best shot in the entire world. How do you get a bull's-eye every time?" And the sharpshooter said, "Oh, that's easy, I shoot first and then draw the target."

I am a newspaperman. I've been that most of my life. I once talked to a group of architects and told them that we at least had one thing in common. We all put our mistakes out where everyone could see them. I could tell you also about being a small-town editor. There's the story about the big-city editor who was calling on a small-town editor and wanted to know,

"How in the world can you sell a newspaper in a town where everybody already knows what everybody else is doing?" And the small-town editor replied, "Everybody may know what everybody else is doing, but they buy a paper to see who has been caught at it." Frankly, part of my mission as Secretary of the Department of Art, Culture & History is to see that everybody is caught at it. I want everybody in North Carolina to be involved in what we are doing, and nothing is more important in getting citizen involvement than the public libraries of North Carolina.

I would like to tell you, however, a little about the approach we are taking in government reorganization. As you know, this is a mandate of the people adopted by Constitutional Amendment in 1970, and then implemented by the General Statutes in the 1971 session of the General Assembly. The object is to try to bring some coordination to all the multiplicity of State agencies. There were, in fact, 317 and they all went their separate ways. But they have been consolidated in seventeen separate departments. In the department which I now head there are

thirty-eight agencies. Well, there are now thirty-nine. I learned last week that I have a new one. It is the Grandpappy Holly.

The Grandpappy is the oldest holly tree in America and is in Pamlico County. The State owns an acre of land around it. There is, in fact, the North Carolina Holly Arbortum Commission, of which our Secretary of State, Mr. Thad Eure, is Chairman. I think next to talking to school children, the Grandpappy Holly is his first love. He discovered that a lot of people had been going to see it, or at least go in the vicinity of the Grandpappy Holly. A lot of beer cans and other things associated with our life of leisure today were scattered around the base of the Grandpappy Holly. So he went and reported to the Council of State that something needed to be done about it. The Governor said, "Well, we overlooked that agency so I guess we'll just assign it to Sam Ragan." So he did. I got a very official memorandum from the Governor and the Secretary of State saying that I had to clean up the beer cans from around the oldest holly tree in America. Well, I tell you it has been done and I got the tremendous sum of \$500 in an emergency appropriation from the Council of State to do the job and put a fence around this one acre of land. We hope that it will be protected in the future. I'm sure that when they were counting the 317 separate agencies that this was one overlooked. There must be a dozen more and I expect to wind up with them.

This Department does have a variety of agencies. Most of them have some relationship to art, culture and history. One I'm not so sure about — I'm the only secretary that has a navy of his own. I have the Battleship *North Carolina*, and I'm not sure they knew what to do with it, but they assigned it to my Department. You can stretch a point and say this is an historic restoration. The Department ranges all the way from the battleship to varied programs in the arts — such as those carried out by the North Carolina Arts Council, the North Carolina Symphony, the North Carolina State Art

Museum — to a multiple number of organizations and commissions devoted to historic restoration. We have seventeen historic sites which are owned, maintained and operated by the State of North Carolina, the Office of Archives & History — ranging from the very popular Tryon Palace in New Bern to smaller places such as Somerset Place over in Pettigrew State Park. What we have been encouraging is local initiative in the restoration of historic places. Hoke Plantation in Bertie County, is a fine example of what local people can do themselves in restoration of historic sites. The people there, through dances and bake sales and everything else, have raised enough money to restore this beautiful old plantation home, and it will be officially open on October 4. There are other historic places and they are growing in popularity. Last year there were 936,000 visitors to these seventeen historic sites. We are not only seeing a revival of interest in most things associated with nostalgia, but also an interest in the historical and cultural resources of our State. And this I think is where the public library can take the lead as it can take the lead in so many things. I think the public library can be closer to the people.

I'd like to tell you a story about what the meaning of a person and a library can be. I thought when in my very early years that the most wonderful person in the entire world was Marjorie Beal. I'll tell you why. Living in a rural community of northern Granville County where there were no libraries, I was told, if I wrote to the State Library in Raleigh, they would lend me books. So I did. I couldn't borrow but three books a week, so I made an arrangement with a friend who would also borrow three books a week. In that way I could get six to read during my week. This went on for several years — beginning when I was at the age of seven. How important this one person was, how important the State Library was to me then and still is, is indicated by this story.

Through this service a whole new world was opened up to me — as already you have opened up new worlds to thousands

of other people. Do not discount this personal contact you will have. In fact, I would urge you to continue and press upon this — to get close to the people. My object in this Department is to get people involved in programs of art, culture and history, and none is more important than the public library system of North Carolina.

I'd like to point out that North Carolina does have a commendable record in support of the arts. It was the first state to appropriate tax funds for a state symphony. It was the first state to appropriate tax funds for the purchase of works of art. It was the first state to give support to outdoor drama, and it was here in North Carolina that the great symphonic drama — this new art form, a creation by Paul Green, was born. *The Lost Colony* has been seen by thousands of people since its first season in 1937. North Carolina was the first state to establish a state-supported school for the performing arts, and within a very few years this school in Winston-Salem has developed to a place of excellence and international reputation for the quality of its training. We have taken a small amount of money and made it go a long way. I'd like to tell you that this year — this current fiscal year — this Department of Art, Culture & History has a total budget for all of these thirty-nine agencies of less than one-third of one percent of the total state budget. I told the Advisory Budget Commission not long ago that beginning with next year we're at least going to ask for one-half of one percent of the total state budget.

This is what we are proposing for the State Library. One of the most important requests which we are making and one which is being given top priority is an increase in state aid to local libraries. I am hopeful that this can be done. This is going to be the number one thing as far as my department is concerned, but I will need your help. Even if we can get before the Advisory Budget Commission, we've still got to sell it to the General Assembly. If any of you know members of the North Carolina General As-

sembly, I hope you'll also put in a good word for this request brought by the State Library.

There are several other things which we are initiating in the library program. We are trying to give a new stature to the In-WATS service; all of you are familiar with it. It's amazing to me sometimes to discover the services which the people of North Carolina can get free which they do not know about, and this is true within the agencies at the top level in state government. The State Library is the official public information center for all of state government, and yet at the first cabinet meeting I found most cabinet members didn't know this. I'm trying to emphasize to them that if they have a question, all they've got to do is call up and we'll try to give them the answer. The goal which I have through this In-WATS service and the Interlibrary Loan service is that anybody, anywhere, at anytime can call up and ask any question and can get an answer, or be told where they can get the answer, within a fairly short time.

Mrs. Marilyn Rose has done a tremendous job with developing a first-rate library of films. Her division is really reaching the lives of all the people in North Carolina, and we hope that under some new changes in our policy of film loans that we'll reach even more. This is an experiment in which we will be opening up the film service to more and more people in North Carolina. One of the reasons is that I think once the people understand what they can get that we can expect more public support for the services which we are now offering.

Do not be mistaken about the importance of people-to-people relationships and the importance of improving the image of the public library. I think you've got a pretty good image right now, but when you are offering a service, you can't wait until people come in to see you. You are going to have to go out and make it known to them. Plans are now being developed in our Office of Public Affairs to give wider publicity to the services which

are available through the State Library and the public libraries of North Carolina.

We are going to some twenty-odd different organizations — some historical commissions, some involved in cultural affairs — to get them reactivated on the local level and to begin serving the purposes for which they were created. Some perhaps have outlived their usefulness. I believe that there ought to be some end put on many programs in state government so that they will not go on and on and on. That is one reason why with one of the newest agencies — the North Carolina American Revolution Bicentennial Commission — we are at least putting an end of 1989. This is an important and significant commission because we are planning an observance of the Revolution beginning this year. Part of this observance is the establishment of goals to improve the quality of our lives. We are going to aspire with the American Revolutionaries of 200 years ago to see if we can accomplish our goals as they accomplished theirs. This is going to be a significant program for all of North Carolina as well as the entire country. I would like to recommend that the public libraries of North Carolina become a part of this program. You can take the initiative in

setting goals for your people and helping them to see that they are brought to a conclusion.

I could talk on for many hours on some of the things which we hope to do, but I'd like to mention that there are services which are free to the people of North Carolina and which so many of the people do not know about. Let's start telling them about it and let's start getting the people involved with the public libraries. Let them feel at home when they walk through that front door. I'm very encouraged by so many of you who are introducing other programs into your libraries. One of the things which I hope to see accomplished through the coordination and cooperation of various agencies with this department is to see the public library become the true cultural center for the majority of the communities in North Carolina.

I'd like to end by sharing with you a motto which the late Henry Watterson, the long-time editor of *THE LOUISVILLE COURIER JOURNAL*, kept on his desk and is one which I commend to you all. It was, "Lord, give us this day an idea and forgive us the one we had yesterday."

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