

Looking Forward: The Next 50 Years

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I am a child of North Carolina.

Now I call Charlotte my home but my roots run deep in the western part of our state in one of the many small cities that are strung together along the I-40, I-85 or I-95 corridors like pearls on a necklace.

In fact, my great grandmother's first husband and father to my favorite great aunt Julia was killed in a dispute over a Mica mine near Spruce Pine. My parents were born in Rutherfordton and Marion – but moved to the 'big city' of Hickory following WWII to find better job opportunities. My mother, her sister and my grandmother made the move first following my Aunt accepting a job at Kress Five & Dime during the war.

My family was successful in Hickory and I lived what can only be termed the perfect childhood...living close enough to school and to downtown that we could walk and explore on our own...with one of North Carolina's great small colleges that made education a centerpiece of community life...probably not unlike many of you in this audience.

Hickory was special for many reasons. The City slogan at the time was 'Best Balanced City' because of the unique mix of furniture, textiles and supporting industries that made Hickory along with much of North Carolina seem immune from recessions. We know that has all changed, even for those of us in the major urban centers of the state, but more on that later.

Hickory was also special because of the arts – 2nd oldest art museum in the state, one of the oldest community theatres, a symphony orchestra, a Russian trained ballet master, potters and furniture makers...many of my childhood friends and their siblings pursued careers in the arts so I was not alone in being captured by the magic of this small city cultural world.

Over the past 35 + years that I have worked as an arts administrator, I have often wondered why so many of us ended up as working artists or administrators from that small city...I have my theories but I think it was tied to a way of thinking about ourselves that is deeply rooted in the red clay or sandy soil across this state. It is grounded in the fact that North Carolina was always a maker state...potters, weavers, furniture makers, brick makers, builders, educators.

That "maker" mind defined us and our state and as we struggle to come to grips with the new economy that is challenging every corner of this state – urban and rural – I believe our future is directly tied to finding that 'maker' state in each of us again. Not to return to the past but to tap our creative energies and skills to redefine what it means to be 'makers' in the 21st Century. I know the work we do every day is directly tied to restoring that 'maker' mind set.

Growing up I was proud to learn about the ways that North Carolina and North Carolinians were different from our neighbors. The 'firsts' we claim so proudly – First English Settlement in the New World, first state supported University or refusing to approve the new Constitution of the United States until the Bill of Rights was added or being the next to last state to secede from the Union, the country's first and oldest arts council in Winston-Salem.

I also recall things that I am not so proud to claim, the Trail of Tears, being the state that sent the most men to fight in the Civil War, our dark history with the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow, even the facilities and water fountains marked by the terms "colored" and "white" of my youth.

There are also the tales of Charlotte being Nashville before Nashville was Nashville and the music of the Briarhoppers, Arthur Smith, Doc Watson, Earl Scruggs, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, Shirley Ceasar, Fantasia and James Taylor....the power of dancers like Mel Tomlinson, the skills of actors and film makers like Andy Griffith, Ava Gardner and Cecil B. DeMille, journalists like David Brinkley, Charles Kuralt, Edward R. Murrow and Charlie Rose, and we can't forget the storytellers Thomas Wolfe, Doris Betts, Lee Smith, Maya Angelou, Clyde Edgerton and O'Henry.

These 'lessons' were shared with me by family members and teachers and the resources that have been built over hundreds of years by those we have chosen to lead us. They also came to me as a 5th grader sitting in the gym at Lenoir Rhyne College in Hickory and hearing the North Carolina Symphony conducted by Benjamin Swallin with his wife Maxine on the celesta as we all sang "We are marching to Pretoria"...or my 7th grade trip to Raleigh – not that different from the vision we heard of Raleigh from Mayberry – and my first visit to the North Carolina Museum of Art, seeing George Washington in a toga in the old capital, the 'death chamber' at Central Prison (talk about scared straight) and seeing that 'out of the ordinary' design of the new Legislative Building that I know now was just a big test for our national treasure the Kennedy Center.

When I was asked to make a few remarks to you about the next 50 years of this state's cultural life, my thoughts were flooded with these stories of my childhood and adult life. And with the stories that mark the extraordinary way that North Carolina has led the country in so many ways. We have built institutions that have protected and made sure we had access to these incredible gifts from our state and fellow North Carolinians.

The story begins in 1812 with the North Carolina Library, the principal library of state government. Today, the State Library supports and builds the capacity of all libraries in North Carolina, and develops and supports access to traditional and online collections such as genealogy, North Carolina culture and heritage and resources for the blind and physically disabled.

The Museum of Natural Sciences can be traced back to 1879, when the merger of the state's agricultural and geological collections planted the seed for what would eventually blossom into the largest museum of its kind in the Southeast.

The North Carolina Zoo grew from an idea initiated by the Raleigh Jaycees in 1967. The first exhibits opened in 1974 as a temporary facility while the permanent Zoo was being built in Asheboro. Opened in 1979, it is now the largest "natural habitat" zoo in the United States

What we now know as the North Carolina Museum of History began as an editorial campaign by the *News and Observer* in the 1880's that resulted in a "gallery of history" in 1898 in the State Museum (now the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences) and moved in 1905 into a public Hall of History. In 1965, it became the North Carolina Museum of History.

In 1903, the Division of Archives & Records was established and now preserves and makes accessible important resources for scholars and 'family genealogists' alike.

27 Historic sites from Manteo and New Bern in the east to Asheville and Weaverville in the west each tell an important story from North Carolina's past, but taken together they tell the story of North Carolina's diverse people and places from early Native American settlement to the Old North State's role in World War II.

The State Park System was established in 1915. What started out as one small plot of public land has grown into 66 properties across the State. The 38 parks and recreation areas, plus an additional 28 rivers, lakes, trails and natural areas include 211,964 acres.

Founded in 1932 and subsequently the first state-supported symphony in the country, the North Carolina Symphony is a vital and honored component of North Carolina's cultural life.

The North Carolina Museum of Art's history goes back to 1947 when the Legislature appropriated \$1 million to purchase a collection for the people of North Carolina - the first art museum in the country to be established using state funds.

The North Carolina Arts Council founded by executive order in 1964 by then Governor Terry Sanford, became a state agency in 1967. In 1977, the General Assembly established the Grassroots Arts Program to ensure that every citizen has access to quality arts experiences. The creation of the Grassroots Arts Program increased the number of local arts councils and helped establish North Carolina as a leader in community arts movement. Nationally, we have one of the largest networks of local arts agencies.

Today, the Council through Grassroots and other granting programs supports hundreds of museums, theatres, orchestras, arts centers, musical groups, educational programs and artists in every one of our 100 counties.

All – libraries, parks, science, art and history are now a part of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, the United States' first cabinet-level state agency for the arts, science, parks, history and libraries.

Each and every one a gift...from those 'makers' long ago and their children and grandchildren and great, great grandchildren...gifts that each of us have received.

But what will our gift be to North Carolinians 50 or 100 years from now?

Sunday, I returned from spending 10 days in Cuba with a group of arts, science and history supporters from Charlotte. It was my second trip to this once forbidden place. However, this time, perhaps because I knew I would be speaking to you today I saw this amazing place with its own vibrant culture, as a not so accidental tourist through the eyes of travelers with me experiencing it for the first time.

We saw colonial and mid-century modern architecture,

Experienced flamenco dance fused with Afro-Cuban drumming and song,

Visited fine art museums and print and pottery studios with work being created before our eyes,

Explored a forest restored from abandoned coffee plantations,

Even our hotel had both historic cannons from the Spanish American Cuban war and bomb shelters and anti-aircraft fittings from 1962.

This drove home the point that our audiences don't see a difference between parks or historic sites, urban farms or environmental restoration projects, museums or orchestras, dance, music or pottery classes. They just see things they love and want to experience and share.

I think we have been given a unique opportunity to give an even greater gift.

To honor the county lines that shape our work but erase them as we serve our residents and visitors – just give them access to experience these amazing resources.

To look for new partnerships and ways of serving – in Cuba, every restaurant and visitor center we visited had live musicians playing traditional, classical or contemporary music – why aren't we finding ways to combine our rich musical heritage with the growing farm to table food movement?

To learn from the brilliance of our legislature in creating the grassroots art program 40 years ago, we must work with today's legislature to create new ways for local communities to provide the financial support for these cultural and natural resources needed in every county to rebuild that 'maker state'.

Just like we need accessible libraries in every community in the state, we need other fundamentals – parks, museums, theatres, concert halls, maker spaces – but maybe this time we look at how we work together with our county neighbors to build these resources with a focus on serving regional audiences.

To address the 2008 recession’s impact on the economy of the entire state – we need to find new creative industries and opportunities to become that ‘maker state’ of the 21st Century.

Perhaps in this new Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, we have been given an opportunity to change the conversation, to build bridges, to find ways to serve our state in new and better ways.

I have served arts councils and organizations from Hickory to Charlotte to Raleigh and back to Charlotte again, but I learned the basics in an internship at The Art Council in Winston Salem.

I have advocated with legislators for over 30 years – Democrat and Republican – about the importance of our work to every community in the state.

I have hiked mountain trails, rode the whitewater of our rivers and strolled our beaches in search of wild horses.

I have served on boards and study commissions and planning groups and grant panels both here at home and across the United States.

I have performed on our stages, sung with orchestras and in choral groups and even made books in a residency at Penland.

And, I cherish every moment of this life that North Carolina arts, science and history have given to me.

I am becoming an old man of North Carolina. But like North Carolinians from centuries past, I can stick at something because of that pine tar on my heels.

We each have stories to share of how our lives have been shaped by the cultural and natural resources of this state we love.

We can each leave a legacy through these resources – statewide and local, large and small, art, science, history, nature, and libraries – the treasures we love.

What will our legacy be?

How will future generations tell the story of this time and how we stood up?

In the lobby – you will find a big map of North Carolina – there are post-it notes there as well for you to write down your ideas for how we ensure access for every resident, for every tourist, for every school child to experience these incredible resources built by the state and by communities across North Carolina.

It is my hope that we take this moment in time to step back, to celebrate these gifts and commit ourselves to an even brighter future by listening to the voices from the past but more importantly the voices of our fellow North Carolinians. They know the answers. We just need to give them the chance to tell us their vision of the future.

Thank you.