

THOMAS GEPHARDT MEMORIAL

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With some chagrin his family says that Thom Gephardt had two great loves in life: his club and his newspaper. That may have represented an inventory of the public side of Mr. Whig but those who knew him better understood that his private person put family, especially his wife Debbie, ahead of those others – yes, even The Literary Club and the Enquirer.

True to his bedrock conservative ways, Thom did not make attachments casually but when he did, they lasted. In the case of the newspaper, it was not just his employer of record but the recipient of his considerable journalistic talents for 32 years. This club was the beneficiary of his extraordinary presence for almost as long, a full three decades.

Thom was a native-born Hoosier, coming from a state known for the line of distinguished journalists it produced in the last century. As was the case with most of the others, he left Indiana before achieving prominence. He spent two years in the U.S. Army after graduating from Anderson High School in 1945 as the Second World War was officially drawing to a close. After that came an undergraduate degree in political science from George Washington University and a master's from the mother church of graduate journalism education, Columbia University. Scarcely beguiled by the bright city lights of New York as the 1950s dawned, Thom returned to small-town Anderson, where he took over the editorship of his hometown paper, the Herald.

The only other professional move he ever made in a craft noted for its itinerant practitioners was to respond to an invitation to come to Cincinnati and the Enquirer in 1960. He was hired as an editorialist but that title short-changed the shadow he cast over the entire newspaper. In a publication not previously known for any worthy ideological cast, Thom's forceful assertion of his well-argued and dearly-held conservative beliefs became the trademark of the paper itself. After he was officially anointed editor of the editorial page, he wrote a weekly column which featured a character named "Mr. Whig," who was not a very well disguised bearer of the Gephardt canon. Part wit and part sage, Mr. Whig viewed with alarm the decline he saw in the manners and mores of his time and advocated a return to a way of life that he believed had forged American greatness. That his proposed antidotes customarily bore the unmistakable signature of the Grand Old Party was a not unintended Gephardt touch.

Thom took considerable kidding, some good natured and some not, for the ways of Mr. Whig. He accepted these jabs with the gentlemanly grace and jocular wit that were the marks of his personality. "I fear for the Republic" was his stock reply when confronted by those more liberal viewpoints he abhorred. He might have chuckled when he said it, but he meant it. Suffice to say, he was a man of conviction. And those convictions were showcased in the countless editorials he wrote about the affairs of the

city, the state and the nation. The world was indeed his apple and his influence rippled far.

But he was also a man who did not issue ukases from an ivory tower. He was a practicing journalist who yearned to see for himself the frontiers where news was being made. He was among the first 400 people to visit the South Pole when he accompanied a Navy group there in 1961. A year later he was part of the first contingent of U.S. journalists to visit Cuba after the missile crisis. From Berlin to Johannesburg to Jerusalem, he was an eyewitness to the testing and turmoil of his century, capturing with his keen eye reportage that made foreign events come alive for Midwestern readers.

He brought the same curiosity and prolific sense to this club. In all, he prepared ten full papers, five budgets and one presidential address, the latter in 1997 during the year he shepherded our affairs. As befits a proper Literary Club person, his choice of subject matter was diverse: Henry Ford's Peace Ship ("The Education of Henry Ford" 30 November '92), a commentary on weeping ("Tears My Father Taught Me" 28 January '80), another one on marijuana ("Everybody's Doing It" 26 November '83), a teen-age Thom talks with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House ("Her Day, My Day 24 September '91) and even an explication of the Arian heresy ("The Iota That Split the World" 16 February '89).

Many of his essays ventured along the byways of American history, from an examination of the principal prosecution witness in the Lincoln assassination trial ("A Mystery of History 3 January '77) to an expose of the scoundrel who destroyed the reputation of that excellent statesman, Warren Gamaliel Harding ("Not All North Carolinians Are Like Frank Mayfield" 10 December '84). His debut paper ("Come Let Us Despair Together" 7 April '75) was an extrapolation from the public philosophy of Walter Lippmann. Other essays dealt with Horace Greeley ("The Sublime Old Child" 22 February '00), health-food guru Sylvester Graham ("Crackers" 27 September '88), and the equivocal Senator Roscoe Conkling ("Here Come the Reformers" 27 October '97). Further afield he wrote about two flawed and tragic heroes: Marshall Philippe Petain ("Gift of My Person" 27 January '79) and General Paul von Hindenberg ("The Old Man Who Opened the Door" 15 September '80).

From his Hoosier roots Thom found a rich field for subjects. The eccentric characters who made up the legal community peopled "The Madison County Bar" (13 March '95). He also ventured into the field of Indiana poesy. Vainly did he endeavor to rehabilitate the reputation of James Whitcomb Riley in "What Every Hoosier Knows" (5 March '90).

Thom's farewell paper, titled "Leftovers" and read *in absentia* only two weeks before his death in November, constituted a moving review of his close association with The Literary Club and a description of topics that his terminal illness would prevent him from presenting to his fellow members.

In recognition of his distinguished contributions to the club he held so dear, Thom was elected to honorary membership a year before he died.

- Respectfully submitted by Herbert F. Curry and William R. Burleigh