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Livingston L. Biddle Jr.

Biddle cites link of arts, rebirth of cities

By ANDY SMITH *10/20/79*
D.C. Staff Writer

Livingston L. Biddle Jr. went to Washington in 1963 to gather material for a political novel he planned to write.

Biddle is still in Washington, but the novel remains unwritten. Instead, Biddle is chairman of the \$150-million National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a federal agency charged with the aid and support of the nation's cultural progress.

It's not an easy job, only one out of every four applicants for funds gets any money.

"With every grant we make three enemies out of the people who didn't get funds," Biddle joked.

The 61-year-old Biddle, a product of Philadelphia's aristocratic Main Line, is well-qualified to head the federal arts agency. As a staffer for Rhode Island Sen. Claiborne Pell in the early sixties, Biddle drafted the original legislation that led to the formation of the National Endowment of the Arts.

At the time, the idea of federal subsidies for cultural projects was not popular.

"People considered me eccentric and impractical at best, and no one gave me much chance of success," Biddle remembers.

Biddle began his career as a writer after serving as a volunteer ambulance

driver in World War II. He was twice decorated by the British government for service in Italy.

Between 1946 and 1962 Biddle wrote four novels based on life in Philadelphia as well as a variety of shorter fiction and non-fiction works.

But after the fourth book, Biddle said, he felt he was running out of material, thought he would turn to Washington for additional inspiration and found a job with Sen. Pell.

As chairman of the NEA, Biddle has tried to spread available money to smaller communities and organizations

in order to foster the growth of art at the local level throughout the country.

Some have criticized the NEA's approach, saying the country's major artistic institutions, the major symphony orchestras, for example, are not getting enough money.

Biddle said funds to the major organizations are not being reduced, and said it is vital to support culture at the grassroots.

Biddle said he has seen a tremendous growth of artistic interest at all levels in the past decade, and said the interest

in the arts is linked with the rebirth of central urban areas throughout the country.

The arts are a major attraction of the cities and can be used as a focus for urban renewal, Biddle said.

Biddle said Rochester with its strong tradition of cultural activity supported by private funds, is a good example of a community where art is a vital part of urban life.

And in the meantime, author Biddle still hasn't given up on his plans to write a political novel. It has just taken a little longer than he planned.

NEA grants announced here

Seven Rochester organizations will receive grants from the National Endowment for the Arts totaling \$307,800 in 1980, endowment chairman Livingston L. Biddle Jr. announced in Rochester yesterday morning.

The Rochester Museum and Science Center received a \$250,000 challenge grant, the first 1980 challenge grant announced by the federal arts organization. Under the terms of the grant, each dollar in federal money must be matched by three dollars of local funds.

The museum has a three-year period to raise the matching funds, and museum officials said they were confident the required funds could be found.

The challenge grant money, along with the matching funds, is intended for the museum endowment fund.

U.S. Rep. Frank Horton, who also participated in the

announcement of the grants, described the challenge grant as an incentive for the community to assist the museum.

"This is not a case where the federal government comes in and just gives out the money," Horton said.

Biddle had high praise for Horton, saying he was one of the early supporters of the National Endowment for the Arts when the whole concept of federal support for the arts was not very popular.

The other NEA grants, which do not require matching funds, are earmarked for a wide variety of local cultural and artistic organizations.

THE GRANTS announced yesterday morning were:

- From Page 1C
- \$4,300 to the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman
- \$7,500 to the Ibero-League Inc. for support
- music and dance tra