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## National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 16

George Popkin

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# Evening Bulletin

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## *Keeney Looks Ahead to New Job*

By GEORGE POPKIN

For the general public—educational television shows and non-profit motion pictures of the highest quality.

For talented young people—greater incentive to devote their lives to the humanities, as against missile-making or money-making.

For the scholar, writer and artist—the means for research and creativity, free from the bill collector's shadow or scarcity of time.

For educational institutions, cultural groups—a new status and new tools for man's study

of man, more nearly equal to those of science.

These are some of the possible gains envisioned for life in America by Dr. Barnaby C. Keeney, president of Brown University, under a new foundation which will marshal a federal army of dollars to help the humanities.

Dr. Keeney, the historian, is to make history. And the other day he discussed his hopes and anxieties in contemplation of his new duties. He recently was named by President Johnson to head the National Council on the Humanities and the National

Endowment for the Humanities.

Both are arms of the National Arts and Humanities Foundation created by Congress to feed government money to literature, philosophy, music, drama, political science, languages and art. Dr. Keeney will start with about 10 million dollars. There will be more.

The program will include fellowships, grants-in-aid, loans to develop study, research, training, publications, conferences, seminars and workshops.

Remarks by Brown's presi-

dent indicate that he will journey on this novel crusade, dressed not in the armor of Don Quixote but of realism and practicality, in expectation of a few arrows shot his way.

Dr. Keeney's reaction to the fear that government may try to control the creative spirit, punish thinkers whose thoughts are not approved and reward others, is typical. He said such pressures are inevitable but that Americans are "a moral people" and

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Keeney

# Keeney Discusses Hopes, Anxieties

Keeney

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the federal system's checks and balances and the overall common sense of its politicians should work against interference.

"I'm sure that here as in any other cases of endowment," he said, "there will be people trying to exert pressure. The nature of our government with its separate branches of Congress, the party system, the press and all the rest work against that."

"The availability of other sources of support in this country," he said, "also mitigates against pressures."

The president of Brown University placed his greatest faith in "the morality" and "courage" of the individual writer, scholar and artist. "They will refuse to yield," he commented, "They will not be dictated to by authority."

In his mind's eye perhaps was the man who drank hemlock in ancient Athens.

Dr. Keeney had been talking of how the idea of government assisting art is not new. He mentioned classical Greece and the Renaissance when "individuals in government" supported some of the finest minds the world has known.

In this connection, Dr. Keeney derided a thought long dear to the Philistine, namely, that an artist does better work if starving in a garret. He admitted that too easy an existence may be bad, but added:

"There's no reason to suppose that a man will not do as good work if he has what he needs to allow him to devote himself to what he is doing. The idea of poverty and great art going together is a fraud."

He mentioned Lord Byron

as an example of one whose talents were not hurt by having money.

Dr. Keeney's main theme is that the humanities have been far outdistanced in the area of government help when compared with the sciences. Purpose of the foundation is not to turn out fewer outstanding engineers and physicists but more composers and scholars of repute, he insisted.

"It is in the national interest," he declared. "Congress believed it, and the members have shown great understanding of the problem."

In this undertaking, Dr. Keeney said, Rhode Island has been a leader. After praising the state's congressional delegation, he asserted:

"This is no accident. Right here in this state there is a much greater concern with cultural matters than is realized. I think our institutions and groups in Rhode Island will play important roles in the foundation's growth."

Dr. Keeney turned from consideration of Sen. Claiborne Pell, who introduced legislation on behalf of the foundation, and Dr. Albert Bush-Brown, president of the Rhode Island School of Design, an ardent supporter, to the man on the street.

"It's a great mistake to think of the average person as not being interested in these things," Dr. Keeney remarked. "All people, those with very little education even, think a lot more about life and its meaning or what goes on in the world than generally is believed."

"They watch television, go to the movies, and I'm sure they would appreciate it if we give them something better to watch. It's a mistake to talk down or look down where the public is concerned. They're a lot smarter than some like to think."

Dr. Keeney's deep voice resounded in emphasis. "I think we can raise the level of their outlook and they can get a lot out of what the foundation will offer."

smote one hand against

the other, rather uncharacteristically. "Their reading is limited by what they know," he declared, "but we can help raise their interests. Then, if we help them come to better, wiser decisions in matters of the national interest or in their own lives, we will have succeeded."

Dr. Keeney gave an example. "If the public has a better appreciation of beauty, it will draw up better zoning laws or decide on more pleasing city buildings and monuments."

Of course, the more direct and immediate benefits will come to the composer who has to work as a waiter to supplement his income as violinist in a symphony orchestra, he said. Or to the scholar compiling a dictionary that might unlock new insights.

The impact, Dr. Keeney reflected, would be most pronounced on campus atmosphere.

"Before the Rockefeller Library was built," he said, "many students felt we were pushing the sciences. They saw the money that went into that and they came to wrong conclusions. We love the sciences but they saw little evidence of our concern for the humanities."

Dr. Keeney continued: "Since the library was built, there has been a change in feeling. The man interested in philosophy or letters can be proud. He doesn't get any ideas of being neglected or downgraded. This helps those uncertain about a career to make a choice that would benefit them and humanity."

After all, the historian inferred, what good is technology if we can't use it intelligently.

Dr. Keeney's attitude toward the tasks ahead might be described as skeptical optimism. He said he is well aware of the possibilities of pressure from Washington some day in some given situation. Or criticism from the galleries, where many diverse opinions prevail among taxpayers.

"It's inevitable," he declared. "These are things to be expected and overcome. But when I look back. . . ."

He said that when a foundation for the arts and humanities first was contemplated, he felt it might be close to 10 years before time for launching. And here, he beamed, the capsule is on the pad, almost ready for orbit.

One point overlooked, he said, is that in some areas private money will match government funds under the foundation's terms. Having been a sleeve-tugger on behalf of a university, Dr. Keeney doesn't face this aspect of his new job with misgivings.

As chairman of the National Council on the Humanities, he will have 26 experts to advise him on how the federal money is spent. The National Endowment for the Humanities controls the funds.

Already the requests are pouring into his office. Some people don't waste any time.

Dr. Keeney spoke of stacks of mails promoting a variety of projects.

"There will be one important rule," he mused. "Merit. Merit, that will be the yardstick."