

Excerpt from *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle and the Awakening of a Nation*

From Chapter 12: New Eyes on the Old South

For progressive reporters and editors in Mississippi, occasional refuge and uplift came in the form of salubrious but not especially abstemious weekend pilgrimages to Greenville, where Hodding Carter Jr., editor of the Delta Democrat-Times, and his wife, Betty, opened their home, Feliciana.

In much the same way that editor Harry Ashmore's home had become an oasis for national reporters rolling through Little Rock, Feliciana became a shelter and a community for an eclectic, exotic mix of national and local newspaper, television, and newsmagazine reporters, foreign journalists, field representatives from progressive organizations in the South, an occasional FBI agent and a few enlightened souls of the Delta who subscribed to *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Saturday Review of Literature* or *The New Republic*.

There, with no agenda, the war-weary journalistic outcasts and their spouses would gather in the house, by the pool, on the tennis courts or at the artificial lake stocked with bream and bass. There they consumed oysters and crawfish by the sackload, downed copious amounts of contraband booze and talked through the night and deep into the Delta morning. Bloody Marys were the first sip of the day.

John Herbers and Cliff Sessions of United Press would be there with their wives. Bill Minor, the Mississippi bureau chief for New Orleans' *Times-Picayune*, would drive up from Jackson with his wife, Gloria. Hazel Brannon Smith, publisher of the *Lexington Advertiser*, would drive over to Greenville and up the winding driveway to Feliciana's door with her husband, Walter, known as Smitty, who had lost his hospital administration job because of her editorials. Smith's steadfast commentaries against liquor racketeering, gambling and official corruption had made her some powerful enemies long before her campaign to curb police brutality against Negroes had led segregationists to label her a nigger lover and Communist and to start a rival paper to run her out of business.

A Jackson television newsman, Dick Sanders, would join the group, along with other local journalists whose struggles to display editorial courage against prevailing Citizens' Councils sentiment drew strength from the weekend exposure to Carter.

There was a sense of daring at the gatherings. No one doubted that the house was always a possible target of night riders, and Carter kept guns all over the place just in case. But strength, not fear, came from the weekends. Herbers knew, as he left those weekends in Greenville, that the only thing keeping him in the news business was Carter's words of support.

Carter had the courage to write what some frontline reporters could only think. In the summer of 1958, Herbers sent Sessions and Carter sent the reporter Jay Milner to cover the trial of Yalobusha County Sheriff J. G. "Buster" Treloar. The sheriff was charged with beating Woodrow Wilson Daniels, a Negro, with a ten-inch blackjack while Daniels was confined to a jail cell. Daniels died ten days later of a subdural hemorrhage.

Three of the four witnesses against the sheriff were white. Daniels' employer, a grocer, said he had seen the sheriff go into the Negro man's cell, then heard sounds of a beating. "I couldn't stand it," he testified. "I had to leave." The white doctor who had been called in to treat Daniels' injuries said he had seen the sheriff kick the injured inmate and curse him angrily.

The jury took twenty-four minutes to find the sheriff not guilty. In the hot, crowded courtroom, the white people broke into smiles. "In the balcony, also crowded and even hotter, the Negro spectators didn't move and their faces remained immobile as they had been throughout the trial," Milner reported.

The sheriff walked over to the evidence table, picked up the blackjack, and pocketed it while his lawyer joked about the case. "Why that jury knew that you can't kill a nigger by hitting him on the head," the lawyer said with a laugh. "You gotta hit him on the heel."

The next day, in an editorial mischievously entitled "Water Valley Meditation," Carter captured the absurdity of the voices coming from all the Sheriff Treloars in the South: "What with all these nosey newspapermen

and preachers and Yankees and other such communistic trash, it's getting to where a Mississippi white man can't kill himself a niggah without getting his name in the papers and losing up to two or three days in court. Downright subversive, we call it, and something ought to be done. Otherwise, what was the use of us winning the war for Southern independence?"

Satire was both the lance and the balm for P. D. East, the editor and publisher of a small and feisty weekly newspaper, the *Petal Paper*, in a south Mississippi county named after the first grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. East, always on the brink of bankruptcy, took the Klan and other segregationists seriously but delighted in making fun of them. After a rash of cross burnings in 1957, he ran a spoof classified advertisement on the front page for "used lumber desirable for making crosses." He offered free kerosene with orders of a half dozen or more and a free booklet, "How to Build Your Own Cross Kit" with every order.

Some levity was also coming out of Charlotte, where one of Harry Ashmore's poker buddies from his early newspaper days, Harry Golden, delighted in making fun of segregationists and their contortions in defense of racial separation.

Golden, the gadfly author of the *Carolina Israelite* newspaper, which circulated weekly mostly among southern Jews, developed a series of "Golden Plans" to show the absurdity of segregationist positions. Golden observed, for example, that whites did not mind standing next to Negroes in the grocery, at the bank and at other counters. "It is only when the Negro 'sets' that the fur begins to fly." The Golden Vertical Integration Plan? "Provide only desks in all public schools of our state," he suggested. "No seats." His Golden Out-of-Order Plan called for hanging out-of-order signs on all water fountains designated for white people; soon, thirsty whites would be drinking out of the "colored" fountains and not noticing a difference.

Golden, whose books had broad appeal in the 1960s, gave liberals scattered and isolated across the South an opportunity to enjoy a collective laugh each week.

It was with Harry Golden and another literary giant, Carl Sandburg, that Atlanta Constitution Editor and Publisher Ralph McGill sometimes sought refuge and emotional sustenance. Over a fifteen-year period, until Sandburg died in 1967, the three men would gather for weekends of quiet talk and expansive debate, rocking in chairs and walking in the woods at Sandburg's antebellum home, set inside the 240-acre Connemara Farms in Flat Rock, North Carolina.

In Atlanta, McGill provided New York Times correspondent Claude Sitton with the same kind of moral support that Carter was dispensing in Mississippi. Whenever Sitton would return to his office inside the Atlanta Journal and Constitution Building, little time would pass before he'd look up and see McGill standing in the doorway.

"Hey, what's going on in Mississippi?" McGill would ask as he walked into Sitton's office. "What do you know that I ought to know?" Sitton shared his findings with McGill, whom he and other younger reporters called "Pappy," and McGill shared his insights and analysis with Sitton. Early on, Sitton learned the price of sharing too much too soon: he'd pick up the Constitution the next day and see his soundings massaged beautifully and crisply into an astute McGill column that had been distributed nationwide – before Sitton had gotten them into the Times. Sitton had to laugh at how masterfully McGill had picked his brain; and he had to groan at the realization that readers who saw similarities in his story and McGill's column were far more likely to conclude that Sitton had stolen from McGill than vice versa.

At the same time, a much more important fusion of ideas and sense of direction was taking place when McGill and Sitton sat and discussed the South and how their profession was covering it. McGill proselytized his fellow journalists with the idea that they had become mindless, robotic followers of the "cult of objectivity," at the expense of truth.

Certainly, reporters had to try to be fair, McGill felt, but he did not see the point of purely objective news presentations if that meant the truth got lost in the process. Objectivity, he believed, was an anachronistic antidote that had emerged in earlier days, when publishers had been wild and reckless in pushing their biases into the newspapers. It had evolved into a formula of printing all sides of the story – sometimes in the same number of words or paragraphs – and leaving readers to make their own choices. From there,

McGill felt, the goal of objectivity had devolved to the point where newspapers had become neutered. If a public figure said something that was untrue or mischaracterized a situation, McGill felt, most newspapers wouldn't report the falsity unless the reporter could get someone else to point it out. And if that someone else stretched the truth, McGill said, newspapers devoted to blind objectivity found themselves in a bind, printing two falsities.

If Citizens' Council leaders in a town, for example, said they were not putting economic pressure on Negroes to withdraw their names from petitions and the newspaper had incontrovertible proof that they were, why were newspapers so reluctant to report it? Why did they have to wait until they found someone who was willing to say it on the record? Why did they fall back on the conventional thrust and parry of grouping the allegation and denial all in the first couple of paragraphs, which steered readers away from the truth, not toward it? McGill felt that Sitton and the Times were exceptions.

The Times had embarked on a bolder form of news coverage that gave reporters room to go deeper in explaining and interpreting news events and developments. Sitton was a tenacious reporter who did his own legwork, who didn't rely on official sources, who reflexively felt the need to cover the same ground as investigators, and who trusted his own judgment to guide his articles.

But even with Sitton's reporting, McGill's analysis and their combined understanding of the South and its people, the question neither could answer, the question no one could answer, was how far each side of the racial divide was willing to go to get its way. To McGill, Ashmore, Carter, and other liberal editors in the South, massive resistance as a toy weapon in the hands of a James J. Kilpatrick, segregationist editor of the Richmond News Leader, was one thing; but it was quite something else in the hands of armed and dangerous freckle-bellies, as Bill Emerson, Newsweek's Atlanta bureau chief, called the great unwashed. Massive resistance, once allowed to root, could not be controlled or contained and would lead to a kind of brutal lawlessness that none of its high-minded advocates wanted on their consciences. If you allow the states to thumb their nose at federal edicts, the editors asked, what's to stop all those poor, angry backwoods white folks, whipped into a paranoid frenzy by demagogues, from taking the next step? And who was going to stop them?

Some segregationist editors were asking the same thing.

WHO GETS THIS PAINTING?

WOONG WALTER

May 21, 1989

By Hank Klibanoff

IT IS THE MIDDLE OF A WARMING MORNING IN THE DEW OF A NEW YEAR that will bring Walter Annenberg many accolades. All is quiet at the center of his world: his ranch-style estate, Sunnylands, which crawls green and graceful over the whiskered flatlands of Rancho Mirage, Calif.

Outside, tour buses roll slowly on fat, silent tires along Bob Hope Drive and Frank Sinatra Drive, past eucalyptus trees, security fences and the scornful eyes of rotating video cameras. Crane though they might, the tourists cannot see inside, where he has made the hills roll, the waters gather and the desert bloom. Inside the oasis, his servants, stewards and secretaries man his automated front gate; tend his 205 acres of imported hills, greens and ponds; bang out his correspondence; and prepare his lunch in a kitchen that has served the highest and mightiest, including Elizabeth the Queen, stars of stage and screen, Nixon under the gun and Reagan having fun.

All around him are his "things," as he calls them - paintings, sculptures and decorative objects that make up one of the world's most dazzling collections of art. Every view from every angle reveals hundreds of millions of dollars worth of artistic passion, highlighted by 50 of the most spectacular impressionist and post-impressionist paintings ever put to canvas. They arouse the sweet tipsiness that a first sip of wine lends to a night of romantic exploration. Before this orchestral blending of color and beauty, serenity and rapture, the brain stumbles. The mouth stops mid-sentence. The eyes waltz but the feet are stilled, for fear that the slightest misstep will dissolve this vision of heaven.

Not since 1969 have Walter and Leonore Annenberg shown their paintings publicly. That show, at the Tate Gallery in London on his arrival as Nixon's U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James's, lasted only 36 days; since then, they have doubled their holdings. In the last two decades, virtually every major museum has been maneuvering to exhibit them. Always the answer was no. Until three years ago, when Priscilla Grace, a museum patron, invited the couple to a candle-lit dinner at her 250-year-old farmhouse outside Philadelphia. She seated Annenberg next to Anne d'Harnoncourt, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The appetizer arrived, and d'Harnoncourt felt an unquenchable impulse. "Something impelled me to ask, right then and there, if there was ever a possibility that the museum might show his collection."

Annenberg considered. "How would the summer of 1989 be?"

Success so quickly where legions had failed! D'Harnoncourt, who understood what a cultural and financial blessing this would be for Philadelphia, sputtered that it sounded fabulous. "Done," said Annenberg.

The decision to allow a public exhibition - "Masterpieces of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: The Annenberg Collection," which opens today and runs until Sept. 17 - may have been made casually, but the reaction has been anything but. Was Annenberg signaling that he had picked a final home, here, for his highly coveted collection? Or was he offering Philadelphia a tantalizing consolation prize, because he planned leave it to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Washington's National Gallery, Los Angeles' County Museum of Art, Paris' Musee D'Orsay, or to his daughter, Wallis?

What was important to him? Size of audience? Location? Endowment? Would he spread his paintings around or keep them together? What would he want in exchange? And what can you possibly give the man who has everything? Immortality? Yes, but what else? Had the pursuit of the collection, and the courtship of the Annenbergs, finally ended - or just begun?

Still vigorous at age 81, Annenberg sits in a china-white sofa chair in his vast living room, surrounded by luxuries that mark him as one of the world's wealthiest men. The rising sun diffuses around him. The glow from the marble floor bathes him. What about the long-range future?, he is asked. What about the collection?

Annenberg blows air into his lips and begins: "It all depends. . . ."

"I know of no private collection in the world that has a greater concentration of quality."

- J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery, Washington

"I would say he's really unrivaled. His rival was probably his sister (Enid Haupt), and he bought her collection and amalgamated the two into probably the premier collection of impressionism in this country and probably in the world."

- David Nash, senior vice president and director of fine arts, Sotheby's, New York

"It's an unusually large compilation of masterpieces in a single collection . . . The taste is palpable. There is a unifying thread, which is the eye of Walter Annenberg for very strong, very expressive pictures."

- Philippe de Montebello, director, Metropolitan Museum, New York

SINCE THAT FORTUITOUS DINNER, most of the major museums have joined the Annenberg Hunt, seeking to show the collection in their turn. They are angling, of course, for something more permanent. The reason is simple: There is a finite amount of great old art out there in private hands. Most is already in museums, and the masters are just not churning it out like they used to. Claude Monet hasn't put anything on canvas in more than 63 years, Paul Cezanne in more than 83 years, and Vincent van Gogh in more than a century.

So the only way for a museum to get that art is to buy it, or inherit it. Today's overheated market - which would put several of Annenberg's pieces in the \$30 million-to-\$50 million stratosphere - sings the grasp of most public museums. Philadelphia's entire acquisitions budget is a piddling \$250,000.

"As the great private collections are dwindling, museums have to be more elastic and imaginative in the way they seduce donations," says Nash of Sotheby's.

Gone are the days of Andrew W. Mellon, who spent \$50 million to build the National Gallery in Washington, then donated his old masters, on the condition that the museum not be named for him. He wanted to attract donors, not turn them away.

Such selflessness is out of fashion. In 1970, investment banker Robert Lehman offered his collection - 3,000 works of art, covering nine centuries - to the Metropolitan Museum in exchange for a special wing with a curator answerable both to the Lehman family and to the museum. The Met took the deal, which today it wishes were less restrictive.

More recently the Dallas Museum of Art received an unusual offer. In 1982, when it was constructing a \$50 million building, Wendy Reves, the Texas-born widow of European publisher Emery Reves, dangled her entire 1,429-item collection, estimated at \$35 million, plus her opulent 20-room villa in the south of France, in exchange for the museum's commitment to reproduce six of the villa's rooms within its new building. She wanted the Reves art inside those rooms, her name displayed prominently, no art sold without her permission and pieces lent only to major shows for short durations.

What's more, the museum would have to raise an additional \$5 million, and add an 11,000-square-foot wing to a building it had not even completed, all in hopes she was shooting straight - and would stay alive.

The museum agreed, and went from having one Manet to four, from no Renoirs to eight. It also now has a pair of Wendy Reves' slippers tucked under a reproduction of her bed.

"Some collectors are so damned demanding that if you do the right genuflecting, things will come your way," says Richard Sherwood, a trustee at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Sherwood knows about supplicant genuflection. He and other museum trustees tried it with billionaire Armand Hammer. For 17 years, Hammer promised them his entire collection, which is larger but less distinguished than Annenberg's. He told the newspapers, put it in his autobiography, even said he could not foresee ever changing his mind.

For 17 years, the museum crafted its acquisitions policy accordingly. It didn't pursue prints by the 19th-century French artist Honore Daumier because Hammer already held the world's most extensive Daumier collection. It bowed out of auctions when it found itself bidding against Hammer. The idea, always, was that what was his would be theirs.

But in mid-1987, Hammer began making demands. He wanted the collection kept together on an entire floor; he wanted the names of other donors removed from "his" galleries; he wanted a promise that none of his pieces, some of which were mediocre by any standard, would ever be sold; he wanted the curator accountable only to the Armand Hammer Foundation; he wanted a full-length portrait of himself at the collection's entrance - and he wanted all agreements to extend until the end of time.

The museum's board members, heart-stricken by the wasted years, stood up to Hammer, who promptly broke ground to build his own museum.

NO ONE EXPECTS ANNENBERG to be that demanding, but everyone knows he can get what he wants.

Museum directors, curators and trustees have spent hours reading about the Annenbergs, maintaining files on them, visiting them, showing up where they show up, and reaching out to their relatives. The entire courtship, the collector says with a puckish smile, has been marked by "a certain cordiality."

Philippe de Montebello, the director of the Metropolitan, says tersely when asked how his museum is wooing the couple: "Not appropriate for me to comment." Yes, Leonore Annenberg is on the board of trustees. Yes, so is Annenberg's favorite niece. Yes, he's known the Annenbergs for 20 years and stays in touch with them. And, of course, he wants the paintings. "Only a fool would not have the dream of adding part or all of this collection to his or her own collection."

All around de Montebello's low-ceilinged office are printouts and papers; at his feet, on a wrinkled blue carpet, is an unopened issue of *Le Monde*. Within his reach are two telephones, stacked files, probably 30 pipes, a tape dispenser, and a box of chamomile tea - but only one book. There at the end of a low bookshelf, only inches from his knees, stands *The Annenbergs*, by John Cooney.

Any particular reason he's reading that?

He blanches. "Am I reading the book about the Annenbergs?" All he'll say is, "The only good strategy is not to be revealed - if there is one."

In Washington, National Gallery director J. Carter Brown digs into his files for letters he wrote Annenberg, from 1972 to 1987, asking to show his collection. Annenberg kept putting him off. Brown still longs to add the paintings to the gallery's permanent collection. "We stay in close touch," Brown says. "He's told us he hasn't made up his mind, so I don't bug him about it."

In Philadelphia, there is an almost aching recognition of the impact the paintings, placed here permanently, would have on the museum and the city - the respect, the prestige, the scholarship, the visitors! Impressionism is the best-recognized and most popular style of painting. "These are the artists that bring in the audiences," public relations manager Sandra Horrocks says. The museum's highest attendance came in 1969, when 410,000 people lined up to see works by van Gogh.

Museum president Robert Montgomery Scott says, "It would be an absolutely tremendous expression of confidence in Philadelphia. . . . We'd all take a deep breath and stand a little taller."

D'Harnoncourt does not want the Philadelphia museum to be perceived as presumptuous. Its only goal, she says, is to showcase the "Masterpieces" exhibition. "We're simply doing our best. We view it as a really wonderful opportunity to present a group of pictures to the public for the first time. . . ."

The museum began its courtship with many advantages. This is where Annenberg lived and still maintains a mansion. This is where he made his money, through Triangle Publications (TV Guide, Seventeen and the Racing Form) and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News*. This is where he made even more money by selling them. And this is where he put much of his money back, contributing tens of millions of dollars to

philanthropic causes.

Annenberg's longtime friendship with Hope and Edgar Scott and their son, Robert Montgomery Scott, is the most powerful link. That relationship was solidified in 1969, when Bob Scott became the ambassador's special assistant in London, and his confidante.

What's more, Scott has brought about changes at the museum that Walter and Lee Annenberg, who is a trustee, have endorsed with a million dollars here, two million there. To the current capital campaign, they contributed \$5 million. They started with \$2 million. Then last autumn, they visited Bob and Gay Scott at their Wayne home for dinner and bridge. "We couldn't eat in the dining room because it had all the plumbing fixtures from the downstairs toilet in it," Scott recalls. "And the living room had furniture from the dining room, which was having the ceiling redone, and so we had dinner at the kitchen table. . . ."

"And Walter said, 'I'm going to raise my pledge by \$3 million.'" Scott laughs at the memory. "I thought, 'Really, considering the fact that he probably doesn't eat in the kitchen very often. . . .'"

Not sure what other pursuers were doing, but leaving nothing to chance, the Philadelphia museum maintained frequent contact with the Annenbergs. When Annenberg's sister Enid Haupt wanted to see the Philadelphia Flower Show, d'Harnoncourt and Joseph Rishel, who is the "Masterpieces" curator and also d'Harnoncourt's husband, were there to escort her. And in March, when Scott and d'Harnoncourt traveled to Palm Beach, Fla., to lecture at an arts society, they dined both nights with Haupt and another Annenberg sister, Jan Hooker.

But the boldest move was a direct appeal to Annenberg himself. How about naming some of the galleries after him? How about the 12 Johnson galleries?

John G. Johnson, a nationally prominent Philadelphia lawyer, left his 1,300 works of art, most of them European paintings from the 14th to the 19th centuries, to the city when he died in 1917. The city kept them in Johnson's home at 510 S. Broad St. until 1933, when Orphans Court ordered that the collection be moved to the 5-year-old Art Museum and displayed together.

Keeping a collection intact as bequeathed is often a problem because curators prefer to group periods and genres together. And for years, the Philadelphia museum has been trying to relocate the Johnson collection more appropriately throughout the building. This year, on Feb. 23, Orphans Court approved an agreement to do so.

When Scott announced the decision to the trustees, he was ecstatic. He called the approval "a matter of such transcendent importance" and "one of the major milestones in the museum's history since it opened."

What he knew, but didn't say, was that he and John L. Dorrance, the board chairman, had already asked Annenberg for his permission to name those galleries after him, and to reserve them for 19th-century European paintings.

Scott later insisted that the gesture had nothing to do with the pursuit of Annenberg's collection. He said that he and Dorrance (who would die of a heart attack 2 1/2 months later) wanted to recognize past generosity. "The fact that there are Annenberg galleries in the Philadelphia Museum of Art isn't going to make 2 percent difference on what he does with the collection overall. He's got Annenberg institutes and Annenberg schools and Annenberg hospitals, so he's going to do it based upon something else."

Still, given the timing, it had that scent. On Feb. 1, about 6 p.m., Scott and Dorrance drove to Annenberg's Wynnewood estate, Inwood. The collector escorted them into his wood-paneled library. Surrounded by books, photographs and portraits, they chatted. Then Scott got down to business: He wanted a favor.

"For our own fund-raising needs, it is of considerable importance to the museum to recognize major donors so others will feel like doing the same thing." Scott let Annenberg take that in, then continued. "We would like to name the galleries across from the Dorrance Galleries the Annenberg Galleries."

"Go ahead, I don't care," Annenberg recalled saying.

But he did care. Two days later, after he had left town, Annenberg called Scott. He was not happy. He wanted to hold off. "He said he wasn't sure he liked our attitude," Scott said later. "He said he wasn't sure he wanted to do it, that he wasn't sure he wanted his name that much associated with the museum. . . ."

Scott felt woozy. "There was a certain amount of sinking," he said.

And, it turns out, there was something even worse going on.

WALTER ANNENBERG had been unhappy with the museum before. It was a different place when he was on the board in the 1960s: He found it poorly managed and negligent in developing annual giving. "There were some citizens who thought that the museum was just a special place for certain people," he says of that period.

Scott says, "He had no time, but no time, for the then-director, Evan Turner . . . and the board was really split. I think he thinks of those days, then he looked north and thought of the Metropolitan and thought the Metropolitan really looked substantially better-run than we were. I think he's right. I'm not sure he's right now. . . . He quit the board in about the mid-'60s, I guess, and we didn't look so good then."

In organizing "Masterpieces" - that is, in courting the Annenbergs and trying to help them forget the troubled past - many of the museum's majestic steps forward were followed by pratfalls. Not infrequently, what the museum's leaders did right was matched by something they did wrong - or something that was done wrong to them.

The museum established a budget of \$900,000 and told potential contributors that Annenberg would no doubt consider Philadelphia's generosity when weighing his collection's fate. But the fast-motion fund-raising drive ran into a slow-motion response likely to give Annenberg an unpleasant flashback. The museum met its goal, but not easily. The Women's Committee put up a chunk. Foundations came through in a big way. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania weighed in nicely. And some individuals were generous.

But only a few. Scott went to Rupert Murdoch, who in 1988 had purchased Triangle Publications for \$3 billion, to see if he had any allegiance to Philadelphia - or wanted to acquire evidence of it. "For not all that much money, I just thought it might be something that would catch his fancy," Scott says. Forget it, the Australian said. "He'd already paid for his Annenberg material."

Then to Capital Cities, which had purchased much of Annenberg's media holdings in 1970, including WPVI-TV (Channel 6). "It just was not of interest to the local people," Scott says. "It took them all of about 30 seconds to turn me down."

Corporate Philadelphia was not moved. Some companies resisted because they saw it as a Philadelphia-only show, and others questioned why they should contribute to the art exhibition of so rich a man.

"Let's face it," says public relations manager Sandra Horrocks. "People don't want to give money to a man who has \$3 billion. " Still, asking anyone to pay for an exhibition of his art - especially when you hope one day to own it - is like asking a co-worker to pay for his own retirement party, forgo his pension and give you a ride home.

In the end, only Cigna chipped in, \$50,000 for advertising.

Sluggish fund-raising was embarrassing, but something the museum could finesse. Not so the humiliating impact of city budget calamities.

Under a longstanding agreement, the museum must use city employees for security and maintenance. But the city, only four months before the "Masterpieces" show was to open to hundreds of thousands of visitors, had allowed staffing to drop so low that the museum had to close Tuesdays, a second day of the week.

A disconcerted Scott went before City Council. Although attendance, memberships and capital fund-raising were rising, he said, the guard shortage had already forced the museum to shut many galleries.

"When people come in from out of town, they want to go and see the van Gogh Sunflowers. 'Where is this painting, the equivalent of which sold for \$55 million?' We say, 'Well, it's upstairs, but you can't see it.'"

Even before he explained the dilemma to City Council, Scott had called the Annenbergs. "He really understood, but he didn't like it. He said, 'I understand, given the city's situation and the number of people you have, that that's all you can do.'"

Scott was not reassured. "Surely one of the things which influences them on where they lend and ultimately where they place their collection is the number of people who will see it. And one function of that is the number of days open."

Scott still can't shake the chilling recollection of a visit by Annenberg last summer. "He came here one day when it was very dull. There was nobody around at all." Scott, wincing, feels he knows just what Annenberg was thinking: "My goodness, I can't have my paintings there. Nobody will see them."

Mayor Goode eventually promised enough overtime pay to keep the museum open six days a week at least until June 30. But other problems emerged. Rishel, the show's curator, and Colin Bailey, his assistant, were putting so much time into a beautiful and scholarly catalogue that they could not give the designers much guidance. Construction fell behind; the overtime Scott insisted he would not pay became necessary to open on time. The construction crew had to cram 10 weeks of work into six. Short-staffed and weary, the carpenters began passing around cards to join a union.

Lethargic funding, budget troubles, busted deadlines, union hassles - and more to come. Annenberg, back in California, was wondering what in the world the museum was doing with a rare 81-page collection of Cezanne sketches, probably worth about \$5 million, that he had donated in late 1987. They still hadn't been displayed. And while Philadelphia was doing who knows what, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had scooped Philadelphia by showing other Cezanne sketchbooks in spring 1988.

The Philadelphia museum had its reasons. It planned to show the sketchbooks with the "Masterpieces" exhibition - even giving them their own catalogue - but had not solved the tricky problem of displaying both sides of the pages. When Horrocks visited the Annenbergs in February, the collector expressed his displeasure. "All you have to do is stick it between two panes of glass," he said.

Horrocks nodded her head in deference.

"I'm surprised," Annenberg reproved, "because you've had them over a year now."

BUT WHAT REALLY LIGHTED Annenberg's fuse was a telephone call. It came from d'Harnoncourt, around the last week of January, and led Annenberg, one of his art-dealer friends said, to threaten to cancel the entire show. It may also have been what changed his mind so abruptly about the naming of the galleries.

D'Harnoncourt had made the call after some consideration: The museum wanted its catalogue to be unimpeachable. During two weeks at Sunnylands, while the Annenbergs were traveling, Rishel, Bailey and a photographer had been able to dismount and examine the canvasses more closely than ever before. They felt their research was breaking new ground. Then they came upon a problem that had persisted for several years.

For some reason, never fully explained, John Rewald, the world's leading expert on Paul Cezanne, had omitted from his compendium of Cezanne watercolors a small Mont Sainte-Victoire that Annenberg owned. Did Rewald doubt its authenticity? If so, the museum would have serious concerns about showing it. If not, why did Rewald's otherwise all-inclusive work ignore it?

The museum called Rewald, an erudite and irascible old man. His response was ambiguous, and he was unwilling to explain the omission. D'Harnoncourt and Rishel finally decided that she would call Annenberg and ask him whether, given the ambiguity, he felt strongly about whether the piece should remain in the exhibition.

Annenberg did. He quickly dialed his old friend Harry A. Brooks, who is president of Wildenstein & Co., the New York gallery where the collector had bought the watercolor. Brooks recalls that a "very annoyed"

Annenberg declared: "This, as far as I am concerned, is a Cezanne." Annenberg told Brooks that in talking with the Philadelphia museum, he "even got to the point of saying, 'If you don't exhibit my collection as a whole, you're not going to exhibit the collection!' . . . He said, 'After all, what do they think they're doing? I've just given them \$5 million, and they're telling me -'" Brooks breaks off in laughter.

He can laugh now. His research indicated that Wildenstein had purchased the watercolor from the son of a French painter, Emile Bernard. "And the story was that Emile Bernard . . . had painted Cezanne's portrait and that Cezanne, in thanks, gave to Bernard this little watercolor of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Well, we were able to contact the daughter of Emile Bernard, who said she remembered that it had always hung in his house and that Cezanne had given it to him."

"Thank God we could substantiate our belief," says Brooks, adding that Rishel later wrote him a letter thanking him and calling him a "prince."

Rishel does not believe Annenberg's displeasure with the questions about the watercolor precipitated his reluctance to allow the galleries to be named after him; nonetheless, in the days after Brooks solved the mystery, Annenberg gave Scott the go-ahead on the galleries.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, WALTER Annenberg had something to prove. His appointment as ambassador was mocked because his credentials were wealth and political friendship, not international diplomacy. The happy result of his unhappy reception was his decision to display his art at London's Tate Gallery.

Scott, his top aide there, saw a personal motive. "My hunch is, and this is only a hunch, that Walter saw that there was something to be gained by showing, particularly in the United Kingdom, that he, aside from being a rich and successful Jewish publisher, is also a person who is really quite cultivated in taste. And one way of doing that is showing probably the greatest expression of his taste and his cultivation, which was at that time and still is his collection."

If that is the case, what is his motive today? Partly, it seems, he wants to take a measure of those to whom he might leave his collection. He says it is a test, and he is a man who sees life as a series of tests.

Walter Annenberg was born, the sixth of eight children, seven of them girls, with a malformed ear and a terrible stutter into a family headed by a publishing magnate who went to jail, in a widely known case, for income tax evasion. The Cooney biography portrays a surprisingly insecure man whose father's deathbed admonition was: "My suffering is all for the purpose of making a man out of you."

Years later, Annenberg's only son, a schizophrenic, committed suicide. His first wife divorced him. And he spent many years, particularly in Philadelphia, courting social acceptance. One reason he admires and collects the impressionists, he says, is that "they were ridiculed, scorned, abused, denounced and very few of them lived to the tremendous respect they subsequently enjoyed." His empathy for their lives explains his personal relationship with their work.

Last year, he agreed to lend three Gauguins to an exhibition scheduled for Washington, Chicago and Paris on the condition that he'd have his paintings back for the winter. So the exhibition went to Paris without them.

"At my age, I'm running out of years," he says, "and the ability to have those Gauguins with me in the winter, when I'm here in the desert, is mandatory."

Nobody wants to face his own mortality, and few have as much to leave behind as Walter Annenberg. That every major museum desperately wants his art does not comfort him. To please one, or two, is to displease many more. And Annenberg does not readily dismiss what others think of him.

More significant, he is afraid of what others might think of his paintings. "I remember once being in the residence of Robert Lehman in New York after his father died. . . . Other people were present, and the remarks that you heard, sarcastic remarks about things that they saw in that home, really bothered me. And to think that I may have that same experience - not that I would be alive at the time - but I would be unhappy knowing that as a possibility."

Annenberg is speaking in his home, Sunnylands, which is peaceful except for the conflict of his attire - lime-green pants, emerald-green sports coat, a pale-yellow sports shirt, yellow socks and black loafers. He is conversational and charming.

Lee Annenberg, whom he calls "Mother," looks stern, though she eases up. She wears a pale-mint blouse and pants that nearly match the celadon wood-paneled walls. Like her friend Nancy Reagan, she coaches her husband and sometimes cuts him off when he's about to say something vaguely controversial.

They lead their visitors through an expansive room perfectly appointed, yet disconcerting for its apparent lack of purpose, until you notice the paintings on the lava-rock walls. Annenberg moves with a relaxed dignity, by leaning at the waist in the direction he wants to go.

Dead ahead, 15 long strides across a gleaming marble floor, is an interior garden where green and pink bromeliads encircle the feet of a Rodin statue of Eve. Over her head is heavy-beamed latticework, and over that, a cathedral ceiling flows into a skylight that diffuses the illumination. It is impossible not to be impressed.

"When I first went to his house," Scott once recalled, "I thought only two people in the world could have built this, Walter Annenberg and the Shah of Iran. Now we're down to one."

Joe Rishel remembers a "paradisiacal" feeling. And the overpowering art! "You see these pictures as you dream to see them."

Perhaps without knowing it, Annenberg provides the interviewer with hot news: He has decided that after the Philadelphia show, he will send his collection, in successive summers, to New York, Los Angeles, and probably Washington and Paris. "Only in the summer," he says, "because I'm here in the winter, and I want my things with me."

Sandra Horrocks, seated nearby, is disappointed. The Philadelphia museum would prefer its show to be exclusive.

Now comes the question: What about the long-range future? What are your thoughts on what to do with the collection?

And now he blows air into his lips. "It all depends on circumstances that I cannot foresee at this particular period." He sounds as if he's reciting a prepared response. "But broadly speaking, I think my pictures are of such a quality that ultimately, ultimately, they ought to be in the hands of others, available to the public."

He pauses seven seconds, then continues. "And yet you never know what set of circumstances may befall any one of us that might change your thinking."

What are you referring to?

Lee Annenberg speaks first: "Just haven't made up our mind."

"That's about it," he agrees.

"It's a very difficult decision -," she says.

"It's a difficult decision," he agrees.

"- and we talk about it from time to time, but we just haven't been able to make up our minds." She sounds impatient.

It comes up frequently, though?

"Yes. It's something we have to face. We just are torn between several ideas," she says.

What is important, that it be kept together?

"I'd like to see that, yes," he says. Then he repeats, "But then again, you never know what circumstances are going to come up that might create some other scenario. . . . Suppose I found myself in the bread line."

"Oh, Walter!" Lee Annenberg says with a bursting laugh. So he chuckles, too.

"The decision Walter has to make is whether the pictures are going to go to a major museum, or whether this stays here as a museum, or whether we could have our pictures someplace else and still keep this as a museum," she says.

"It's a decision that I'm going to be wrestling with for years," he says.

You haven't set a goal, a deadline?

"Well, yes, I've set a goal for myself. And you may quote me on this: Now that I'm fourscore years of age, I am carefully planning to be able to plead the Fifth. That's a good line, isn't it?"

Is it fair to say the exhibitions over the next few years are a trial run of your feelings about doing it?

"That enters into it, yes," he says. "But it may not be a determining factor. But I'll be unhappy about hearing unkind observations of things I happen to love. That would distress me."

And then Lee Annenberg says something that makes Horrocks' heart sink. "When you think of the Met, you really think, they have thousands of people there every day, just enormous viewer -,"

"I think the Met -," he begins.

"- is the greatest museum," she finishes.

"It's the number-one tourist attraction in New York City," he adds.

"It's incredible," she says. "There isn't a day you go in there they aren't just jammed. . . . And it goes up when they have special exhibitions. And they have enormous educational programs. They are a great museum."

But enough questions. Enough hints that time presses him for a decision. Now he wants to immerse himself in the wonders of his collection. He gives a passionate tour: nearby, a Chinese carving of a seated bull, all jade, the size of an infant; behind him, the 6 1/2-foot canvas of Monet's Water Lilies; to his left, van Gogh's Woman Rocking a Cradle.

Annenberg skirts past matching blue cloisonne side tables, past van Gogh's Vase of Roses, notably without thorns, and past a favorite, Gauguin's Portrait of Women. He's caught up in this. Linger in front of Monet's Path Through the Irises, take in Cezanne's Portrait of Uncle Dominique as a Monk, and Annenberg has moved on.

But in time, he comes to a stop. Lee has quietly slipped behind one of the invisible doors, painted the same pale celadon as the walls and marked only by waist-high handles.

Annenberg stares out a bank of picture windows onto radiant green hills. The ponds are startlingly blue, and rising from the earth is a towering beaucarnea, an exotic Mexican tree as dramatic as the paintings inside.

His mind shifts from his art to himself, from what has been to what will be.

"I'm the pioneer out here," he says wistfully as he examines the tree and the San Jacinto mountain range behind it. "I bought this raw. This was all raw sand, absolutely raw sand. Nineteen sixty-one, about. I was the pioneer in this area."

A visitor remarks on the spectacular view. "View?" Annenberg says. "Why, the excitement of the property is the fact that the outside works so beautifully with the inside. It's unique. "

He pauses. His long face is hard to read.

"Oh, I'm mad about this property," he finally says. He laughs without mirth. "I hate the idea of dying. I'm going to miss this so much. "

Sidebar:

A GALLERY OF FAVORITES

The public's good fortune is that Walter Annenberg uses his great fortune to purchase art - and that his instincts steer him to universally appealing, high-quality paintings.

"It's absolutely touching the way he likes each picture individually," says Harry A. Brooks, president of Wildenstein & Co., the New York gallery where Annenberg bought many paintings. "He has a tendency to like likable pictures."

Annenberg is drawn to expressive paintings, particularly of women. He liked Edouard Vuillard's painting *The Album* instantly. "It appealed to me because there are seven women, beautifully painted," he says, standing in the dining room at Sunnylands, his California estate, where it hangs. "I grew up with seven sisters, so it was a must for me. . . . I renamed it *The Seven Sisters*."

As if his paintings might have ears, Annenberg claims no favorite. But then he gives a nod to Paul Gauguin's painting of a mother and daughter, titled *Portrait of Women*. "That really suggests the story of life . . . innocent expectancy in the face of the younger woman, and cynicism experienced in the face of the older woman. . . . That to me is a monumental painting."

That's not saying much. Since the first purchases Walter and Lee Annenberg made in the 1950s - Vincent van Gogh's *Olive Trees: Pale Blue Sky* and Claude Monet's *The Stroller* - most additions have been monumental.

Georges Seurat's *Gray Weather*, *Grande Jatte*, shimmers, and creates shivers. Camille Corot's *The Little Curious Girl* catches a powerfully enigmatic moment. Henri Matisse's *Odalisque*, which the painter kept in his bedroom, exudes colorful, exotic sensuality. Van Gogh's *Woman Rocking a Cradle* is one of five paintings of Mme. Roulin, the wife of the Arles postmaster, who picked this painting to keep. Would-be buyers inquire often about Gauguin's *The Siesta*. Annenberg chuckles about the sullied reputation of the woman with the golden hair, captured in Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *The Streetwalker*. In the crumpled cloth napkin in Paul Cezanne's *Dish of Apples*, Annenberg sees a striking resemblance to the artist's renderings of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*.

Money was rarely an object when Annenberg went art shopping. "Not that he threw his money away," says Brooks. "But so often a person, even a great collector, will say, 'Oh, that's wonderful, but that's too much.' If he wanted it, and even if the price might have seemed high at that particular time, he realized it was a first-class picture and there was no holding back."