

Alan Bock: Freedom's fearless founder

By [ALAN BOCK](#)

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There's a certain danger in these annual tributes to the founder of the company that owns this and more than two dozen other newspapers that we are creating something of an idol long after his death. He would have found this distasteful, I suspect. Unlike other newspaper moguls of his day – Hearst, McClatchy, Scripps, Copley – he didn't name his chain after himself but after what he believed in: Freedom Newspapers, later Freedom Communications – still nominally controlled by the family until we emerge from Chapter 11.

Try as we do to retain a certain distance, however, Raymond Cyrus Hoiles was a remarkable man. In the 1940s and 1950s, some other owners of privately held newspaper chains privately admired R.C. and agreed with a good deal of the freedom philosophy he espoused, but believed that being so open about their beliefs would hurt their business.

Yet R.C. was not only open about his belief in a genuinely radical understanding of individualism and individual liberty, he was open and uncompromising in his advocacy on the editorial pages – and his business just kept growing and prospering. That combination of commitment to firm principles and business acumen is rare. Businessmen tend to be indifferent to principles that don't contribute to the bottom line and true believers tend to be clueless about running a business.

As much as we have delved into R.C.'s activities and spoken with friends and acquaintances over the years, however, something about his personality has remained elusive. Thus we were happy to spend some time recently with Phebe Adams, who was Hoiles' secretary from the beginning of 1966 until his death in 1970. She is still lively at – well, a gentleman doesn't ponder such questions of age – and still has vivid memories.

"I think R.C. was essentially shy," Ms. Adams told us. He could certainly overcome his shyness enough to meet with every new reporter and offer a few pamphlets and a rudimentary explanation of the freedom philosophy. His door was always open, and anybody in the company – or the public – could come in and talk with him about anything. Although he was usually ready to discuss the importance of liberty, however, he was not one to push himself on people or seek personal publicity. He was not much of a joiner.

R.C. was notoriously "close" with a dollar and not fond of extravagance. He certainly didn't overpay people. Yet behind something of a green-eyeshade exterior was a surprisingly warmhearted man who was loyal to people who were loyal to him. He would introduce single associates to one another if he thought some sparks might fly. One or two associates, Phebe told us, had problems with drinking. When they would go on a bender, R.C. would quietly see to it that their families were taken care of, and he held their jobs open when they came down. He might urge them to behave more sensibly in the future but he never threatened to fire them.

As he viewed those who worked in his company as associates rather than employees and earned genuine affection from many, R.C. was also an active participant in what was seemed like a fledgling and besieged freedom movement in the years during and shortly after World

War II, when the combination of the New Deal and wartime economic controls led most "respectable" opinion-mongers to the fashionable position that more controls and perhaps even outright socialism were desirable and perhaps inevitable.

R.C. showcased a very different point of view. The year 1943 saw the publication of Rose Wilder Lane's "The Discovery of Freedom," Isabel Paterson's "The God of the Machine," Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead" and Albert Jay Nock's "Memoirs of a Superfluous Man." R.C. ran long excerpts from these and other writing by these authors, as well as articles by Henry Hazlitt and Frank Chodorov.

The first free-market or libertarian think-tank, the Foundation for Economic Education, was founded in 1946 by Leonard Read, whom R.C. had known when Read was head of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and becoming weary of the milkwater free enterprise the Chamber promoted. Whether R.C. actually gave Leonard the seed money for FEE is a bit unclear – Leonard had a fundraising touch and plenty of other contacts – but R.C. was certainly one of the first donors. Later, when former Cornell professor F.A. "Baldy" Harper founded the Institute for Humane Studies, to identify and help promising free-market scholars achieve academic careers, R.C. was one of the first to write a check. The Cato Institute also was a beneficiary of his support.

As Brian Doherty documents in his fascinating history of the modern libertarian movement, "Radicals for Capitalism," R.C. Hoiles engaged early libertarians in all kinds of discussions and was not shy about criticizing such luminaries as Ludwig von Mises and Leonard Read when he thought they were mistaken or fell short of recommending a fully voluntary society. Disagreements aside, however, he knew who his allies were, and he helped them often. His influence in Orange County has long been acknowledged, but he had at least some influence on the entire country as well.

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