

## A LEADER INTERVIEW . . . A.J. FLETCHER

# Music Fletcher's great love

By MARGARET KNOX

A.J. Fletcher who quietly celebrated his 91st birthday the other day may easily be called a legend in his own time.

The multi-faceted interests of the man include a whole human range of activities—law, broadcast, radio, newspapers, horticulture, and what he described as “my great love—music.”

Fletcher was interviewed in his office at Capital Broadcasting Co. in Raleigh where he is chairman and chief executive officer.

This a very logical place to find A.J. Fletcher whose daily appearance for work is a symbol of his strength and dedication.

His hair and mustache are white, his demeanor is that of the most courtly of Southern gentlemen; his business acumen is one of the best around as well as his courage to fight for principles in which he believes.

“I have lived just one day at a time and hoped I didn't get drowned in the meantime, and also wanted to keep others from drowning me,” he told the Leader.

A.J. Fletcher is a man who has made it on his own through ideas and perseverance.

He was one of 14 children of a Baptist preacher who grew up in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

“My father was a Baptist

minister who took on and received six to nine churches. Why, he organized more churches than the Apostle Paul,” he declared.

He was 14 years old and clerking in a grocery store in North Wilkesboro when he happened an aria from Faust “And I became enamored of it



A.J. FLETCHER

He walked around from his desk to remove a very special framed letter from the wall.

“This means more to me than anything else here,” he explained. It is a letter from his father who wrote him this note at age 85:

“Dear Fred, The oranges came today. If I should die tonight you will not have a regret. You have been loyal, obedient and kind all the way. God bless my dear son. Devotedly, Papa.”

A.J. Fletcher was 56 when he received this letter from his father, and has cherished it ever since.

... I'll go anywhere to hear that.”

That was the beginning of a very special love affair with music which keeps him excited to this day. Fletcher, of course, is the founder and benefactor of the National Opera Co. which has

performed before so many hundreds of thousands of school children in North Carolina, singing opera in English.

In answer to a question, Fletcher indicated a willingness for the National Opera Co. to perform in other states so that school children could enjoy music as he did when he was a boy. More than 1,375,000 N.C. School Children already have.

“I've had a deep interest in music ever since I was as high as this desk,” he related. At Wake Forest College where he earned his law degree, Fletcher was frequently soloist in performances.

A.J. Fletcher worked hard to put himself through school. He copied papers for fellow law students for 75 cents a copy, and did a host of other hard, manual jobs.

Early physical hardships merely tempered A.J. Fletcher. His eyes were set on the stars.

He is a gregarious man who loves his family and friends and cautions:

“What I have done must stand by itself. It doesn't need bragging

about.”

But his eyes and face light up when the recent dedication of WRAL-TV's 2,000 foot tower is mentioned.

“I think we have a good representation from the community and many of the Supreme Court Justices were there. Most people said they had a good time and enjoyed the rain,” he reported. The dedication was accompanied by a deluge of rain.

The 2,000 foot tower means that Channel 5 in Raleigh (an ABC affiliate) can greatly increase its service area—perhaps as much as 40 percent.

He leafed through a book of letters from youngsters at the York school in Raleigh who had heard a performance of “Barber of Seville.”

One young person had thanked Fletcher for being so “kind to go the second mile for the people.”

I've nursed the National Opera Company from a pup and supported it for years. My God, I have no patience with people who say the only way they can enjoy opera is to hear it at the Met and

(SEE PAGE 2)

## PCBs lower immunity?

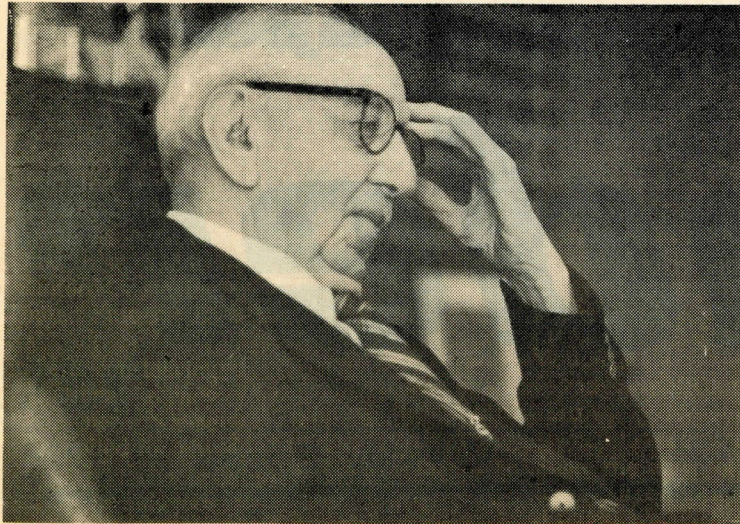
By FRED PARK

Dr. Ernest E. McConnell of the National Institute of Environ-

McConnell.

“But the classic effect is chloracne—which is like acne only more severe. What really

He said NIEHS was conducting studies on PCB's immunity effects, as well as possible “cures,” but they were very preliminary.



# Fletcher celebrates 91

(FROM PAGE 1)

drive to the opera in a limousine and wearing a tall, silk hat," he said.

As a matter of fact, he said one man actually told him this, adding that the man's wife was a strong supporter of the National Opera Co.

"I've been a kid and sang in churches and always participated in music. That is, until I got too old to sing. The National Opera Co. had three performances this past week—two in Goldsboro and one in Faison. They had standing ovations and applause, applause, applause," he said with obvious relish.

The Fletchers had four children, Frank, Fred, Floyd and

Betty Lou.

Frank Fletcher is an attorney in Washington, while his two sons, Fred and Floyd have retired. Betty Lou's son, Jim Goodmon, is president of Capitol Broadcasting Co. and Jim's brother, Ray, is a practicing attorney.

A.J. Fletcher's first wife died, and later he married Margaret Harrington of Raleigh.

Margaret Fletcher frequently accompanies her husband to the office and sees to a variety of details. It seems a very happy marriage.

Back to the National Opera Co., Fletcher said he has essentially the same thing as the Met "without the trimmings."

"I love music and I love to promote it," said the National Opera Company's angel. "Arlene Saunders was with us here for three years, and now Sandra Walker from Sanford is singing all over the United States," he said.

Fletcher said he is considering establishing a national agency for young artists here where voices could be supplied for any opera.

"I've been getting the kids jobs and people write to us for advice because we are so well-known," he added.

One principle that Fletcher wanted to emphasize: "I'm not for anything that isn't first class."

**FOOTBALL**

**Smörgåschord**