

Annotated bibliography for exhibition *Smith & Libby: Two Rings, Seven Months, One Bullet*

Please note: *These notes are my personal opinions offered to assist staff and docent-volunteers in their preparations for the exhibition season. They do not represent the official position of the museum.*

Phil Archer 8.21.23

Adler, Polly. *A House is Not a Home*. Rinehart & Company, Inc. New York, 1953.

Polly Adler was a legendary New York madam. A Jewish immigrant from Belarus, her brothel became a club for columnists, *New Yorker* writers and cartoonists, the humorists of the Algonquin Round Table, organized criminals, and even Mayor Jimmy Walker. See next entry for the connection with *Smith & Libby*.

Applegate, Debby. *Madam: The Biography of Polly Adler, Icon of the Jazz Age*. Doubleday. New York, 2021.

Applegate is a Pulitzer Prize-winner biographer (for her book *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*). Prostitutes and clients that were given pseudonyms in Adler's autobiography are named in *Madam*, including Libby Holman, who is said to have made ends meet through brief employment at the brothel soon after her arrival in New York in 1924. "Fran" was described by Adler as a college student popular among the *New Yorker* and Algonquin Round Table set. But Adler's description of "Fran" is dissimilar from Libby in some key ways. Adler introduces her as a "demure, tidy little creature named Fran...She neither drank nor smoked." Was that ever true of Libby? Even the photograph chosen by Applegate for the chapter shows Libby holding a cigarette. Adler wrote, "When Fran finished 'working her way through college,' she disappeared from the demi-monde to emerge a well-known novelist. I have kept Fran's secret, as I have kept many secrets."

Applegate based her Fran-Libby identification on the papers of Adler's ghostwriter as well as some of Adler's personal documents. In her bibliography, Applegate writes, "Because Polly's world was uniquely riddled with myth-making and lie-spinning, I have tried whenever possible to refer to original sources and to thoroughly cross-check and contextualize them." Applegate's research notes are on file in the Amherst College Archives, but I have not had an opportunity to consult them, so I don't know how she came to believe that "Fran" was in fact Libby Holman. I'm undecided about this. Libby was brazen about sexual matters, as were friends like Talullah Bankhead and Dorothy Parker. Wouldn't they have talked about this episode, especially since Holman made a hit of Cole Porter's song "Love for Sale"? But the Holman family had fallen on very hard times (Libby's uncle absconded to South America with the family firm's money – a million dollars of it) and the Holman children were dressed in hand-me-downs from neighbors. They wouldn't have been able to support her adventure in the city. It is possible that Libby needed this work in order to stay in New York, but Adler's description sounds *nothing* like Libby, so it remains a puzzle.

Bosworth, Patricia. *Montgomery Clift*. Bantam Books. New York, 1980.

This biography recounts Libby Holman's long and complicated relationship with Montgomery Clift – one of the most sustained relationships of his too-brief life – but sheds no light on the case of Smith's death. Around 1950, Bosworth writes that they saw each other nearly every day. He became close to Libby's son, Christopher, and flew home from Europe to stay with her after Topper's death in a mountain climbing accident.

Bradshaw, Jon. *Dreams that Money Can Buy*. William Morrow and Company, Inc. New York, 1985.

The journalist Jon Bradshaw, a contributing editor at *Esquire*, was approached by producer Ray Stark around 1970 with a proposal: write a Libby Holman biography that could be adapted into a vehicle for Barbra Streisand. (Stark had already produced her films *Funny Girl*, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, *The Way We Were*, and *Funny Lady*). The movie was never made, and Bradshaw's book wasn't released until 1985. The cynicism of his book can be judged by its cover, with a title that immediately ascribes a mercenary nature to Libby Holman. Within its pages, however, Libby receives a sympathetic and engaging treatment. Of the three biographies published in the 1980s, Bradshaw's is the most entertaining and the best written. He conducted extensive interviews in Manhattan, Long Island, and North Carolina. However, he failed to get Libby to talk with him prior to her death in 1971. (Her husband Louis Schanker's nephew, Lou Siegel, told me that Bradshaw haunted their Long Island home, Dune House, trying to get Libby to speak about her life). He similarly failed to secure an interview with Smith's sister Nancy Susan Reynolds and Reynolda employee Elizabeth Wade.

Of the three biographies, Bradshaw's is the best for show-business history. He helpfully provides a full discography and Broadway chronology. He does not accept that Smith Reynolds committed suicide. Without naming his sources, he writes that three friends of Libby's reported that she couldn't say whether or not she shot Smith; she was too drunk to say what happened. Gore Vidal, who wrote a screenplay for the never-filmed Streisand vehicle, was a close enough friend that Libby visited him at his home in Italy; yet he made her the murderer in his plot for *Sweet Libby*. Remember, though: this is hearsay.

Gillespie, Michele. *Katharine and R.J. Reynolds: Partners of Fortune in the Making of the New South*. University of Georgia Press, 2012.

Dr. Gillespie, Provost of Wake Forest University, researched extensively in the Reynolda House Archives and conducted interviews with Winston-Salem residents and several relatives of Smith Reynolds. Her treatment of Smith's death occupies only two pages, but the book as a whole is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the full spectrum of achievements and challenges embodied by the Reynolds family saga. Though brief, Dr. Gillespie's concise summary of the shooting and its aftermath remains the best account of "a cautionary tale about the excesses of the rich and famous in a time of scarcity and vulnerability for most Americans during the Depression." It is

impossible to understand Smith's character and actions without an appreciation for his remarkable parents, and Gillespie's book remains the best biography of R.J. Reynolds, Katharine Smith Reynolds, and the city they did so much to shape. (Note: the author incorrectly ascribes the funding of Martin Luther King Jr.'s trip to India to the ZSR Foundation rather than the Christopher Reynolds Foundation.)

Lubin, David. *Ready for My Closeup: A Biography of Sunset Boulevard*. [Publisher and date TBD]

David Lubin is the Charlotte C. Weber Professor of Art History at Wake Forest. He plans to publish a monograph on Billy Wilder's 1950 film next year. The film has two connections. First, Wilder cast Montgomery Clift in the lead role of Joe Gillis, the screenwriter murdered by a jealous older lover. One of Clift's older lovers at the time was Libby Holman. According to Clift's agent, Holman forbade Clift from playing the role, since it too closely resembled their own age difference AND her implication in the shooting of her first husband, another *younger* man. Second, the address of the Norma Desmond house is given as 10000 Sunset Boulevard, a mansion owned in the 1950s by Charles H. Babcock, husband of Mary Reynolds Babcock. The exterior seen in the film was a home given by J. Paul Getty to a mistress, but the address is that of the Babcock house, then shared with his second wife, Winifred Babcock. (Mary died in 1953.)

McLellan, Diana. *The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood*. St Martin's Press. New York, 2000. McLellan traces the sapphic circles of Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Tallulah Bankhead, "and the women who loved them." Libby Holman makes eight appearances in the book, mostly in connection with Tallulah Bankhead, with whom she was particularly close in New York between 1928 and 1932. (Tallulah did *not* visit Reynolda, though Libby's three-time co-star Clifton Webb came down, as apparently did Bea Lillie—whom the author claims had an affair with Libby). McLellan writes, "Libby Holman, the era's great torch singer, was an almost-nightly communicant in Harlem, along with her lover, Du Pont heiress Louisa Carpenter, both dressed for lady-killing in dark men's suits and bowler hats." The book does not offer any insights into the case, but readers who relish drama-world gossip will find a lifetime's worth. Of note is this description of Garbo in the 1950s: "In New York, a new pal was the former torch singer Libby Holman, Tallulah's and Mercedes [de Acosta]'s old girlfriend. Libby had worshiped Garbo from afar for decades, papering her Connecticut estate's interior with pictures of her idol. Like Garbo, Libby lived more or less in seclusion, since the rumors of her having shot her husband in 1932 refused to die."

Machlin, Milt. *Libby*. Leisure Books. New York, 1980.

This was the first of three Libby biographies published in the 1980s. It is mentioned in the exhibition in both oral history stations. Machlin was a successful true-crime writer, and he pitched his book as "the story of a veritable Dragon Lady who killed at least one husband and possibly more, drove lovers to suicide and in some way or another caused the dramatic and untimely death of everyone close to her...It had everything—fast planes, fancy cars, hijinks in high society, dope, beautiful women, orgies—the works." He was

disappointed, however, when he came to Winston-Salem and found few willing to speak to him and no file on the case in the offices of the *Winston-Salem Journal*. He was encouraged to find that Reynolda was open to the public. His “great discovery” was a door concealed in a mirrored wall between bedrooms, through which Machlin suspects Smith entered and found Libby Holman and Ab Walker *in flagrante delicto*. However, Machlin was standing in the west wing of the house, at the opposite end from the location of the shooting. In making this error he was misled by a press photo taken in 1932 of the wrong porch.

The book’s most interesting section is its last. Machlin tracks down Carlisle Higgins, state solicitor in charge of the Reynolds case, later a war crimes prosecutor in Japan following the war, and from 1954 to 1974 an associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. Higgins described the ballistics of the shooting in a way that contradicted the sheriff’s and coroner’s judgment in 1932. (Remember, this is nearly five decades later.) What Sheriff Scott described as a shell embedded in the headboard, Higgins misremembered as a ricochet of the bullet off of the headboard before the bullet exited the window.

Of greater interest is Higgins’ opinion of the Sheriff’s racial attitudes. According to Machlin, he asked Higgins if Holman’s Jewish ancestry had anything to do with the prosecution. “I’m certain it did,” the Judge said, “but I was determined that there would be no repetition in my area of the notorious Leo Frank case.” Machlin asked, “Do you think it is possible that [deputy sheriff] Guy or [sheriff] Transou Scott themselves were members of the Klan?” Higgins stammered for a bit, for the first time in any of my conversations with him. “I...I couldn’t answer that question. I had nothing to do with the Klan, and I wouldn’t want to venture an opinion about that.” Machlin: “I understand in those days a lot of people belonged to the Klan because it was socially and politically desirable.” “I think that’s true,” the Judge said. Machlin: “Certainly some law enforcement people...” “Oh, a good many,” Higgins affirmed. “I saw a good many that I suspected...” These suspicions were confirmed in an interview with Guy Scott, deputy sheriff assisting with the investigation of Libby Holman and Albert Bailey “Ab” Walker. Guy Scott told the author, “Ab and Libby done it. The whole thing was cocked and primed by them Jews up in New York. All them people she brought down with her...Money! Money was the motive. He was one of the richest boys in the world. Don’t you know that?” For his part, Machlin favors the theory that Smith shot himself after witnessing or participating in a sexual scenario with his wife and best friend.

Machlin writes with a muscular, action-driven tone, which is often engaging. (After all, this was the writer credited with coining the names “Abominable Snowman” and “Bermuda Triangle”.) But there are far too many factual and interpretive errors to list here. For one thing, Machlin and the other authors were reliant on a redacted version of the transcript from the coroner’s inquest. For another, the author clearly doesn’t expect his reader to visit Winston-Salem and verify his descriptions. Nancy Susan Reynolds (Smith’s older sister by a year) faults Machlin’s reporting:

“He's not accurate all the way. He's got things mixed up... At least he was not one-sided in that he was against the wealthy Southern family, as the newspapers were. The newspapers were very much sticking up for the little actress who came from New York and was down in that horrible Southern country, where everybody were Ku Klux Klan, you know, that type of thing was their attitude. And they really rallied around her, being very bitter...And he certainly gave Uncle Will a break and his attitude toward Jewish people. I was happy to see that at least somebody was saying something nice...He claimed, the author of the book, that he'd solved it, that it was suicide, and he thought he'd solved it because of the sheriff's attitude, a racial thing. If by any chance it was suicide, I think it would have come more from suddenly discovering that she was depraved than anything else. That's the only thing—the Jewish thing would have been ridiculous because he certainly knew that Libby was Jewish, and what difference did it make if he didn't? He would not have been shocked by that.” Nancy Susan Reynolds interviewed by Lu Ann Jones, Greenwich, Connecticut, June 17--19, 1980. (Reynolda House Archives).

Perry, Hamilton Darby. *Libby Holman: Body and Soul*. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, 1983.

Perry was an editor at the Franklin Library with a side interest in celebrity crime. His book is more engaging in its descriptions of taxis and prop planes than its descriptions of flesh-and-blood humans. He incorrectly reports the final settlement of Smith's estate. He incorrectly states that the bullet fragmented, when in fact it was pieces of the shell casing or jacket that were torn from the bullet. He writes that Ab was in the reception hall, “fifty feet from the sleeping porch” at the time of the shooting. In fact he would have been between 80 and 140 feet from the shooting – a significant difference. He is in absolute fantasyland in imagining a barbecue pit at the boathouse. Of course the cooks prepared the meal and carried it from the kitchen. I could add scores of additional groaners.

Like the sheriff and assistant state solicitor, Perry assumes Smith was shocked to discover Libby was Jewish. Impossible. Dick and Smith were fully ensconced in New York social life. Dick was investing in plays and dating showgirls. Smith was spending every possible night with Libby and her friends, with whom no subject was taboo. Perry seems not to have read interviews with Will Reynolds and Dick Reynolds at the time, in which they recounted Smith's statements about Libby's Jewish ancestry – all positive.

Darby mounts a theoretical prosecution of Libby and Ab, presuming four things: (1) the manner of Smith's shooting was highly atypical for a suicide and physically almost impossible, (2) it is highly unlikely that anyone but Libby and Ab could have entered the room, (3) it's almost certain that they were in the room, and (4) they must therefore be guilty of shooting him. Perry gets confused about the ballistics—wrongly concluding that the bullet ricocheted off the headboard, when it was actually a fragment of the shell

casing or *jacket*. He got this from Machlin, who got it from the faulty memory of the state solicitor almost 50 years after the incident. He also repeats the unfounded theory that Smith was left-handed and could not have shot himself above his right temple (the exhibition proves that he favored his right hand). But Perry makes a tidy argument for a murder conviction. Someone concealed the gun; after three searches of the porch by multiple men, it reappeared on a rug in plain sight, directly where the men entered and exited the room. Both Libby's and Ab's testimonies were full of dodges, evasions, and inconsistencies. Libby lied repeatedly about her age, even when prompted to correctly add two years to her claimed age. She first told the sheriff she heard the report of a gun and ran into the porch, then said that she woke up to see him standing over her with the gun at his temple. She claimed amnesia for the complete day before and day after the shooting. She and Ab waited 10-15 minutes before calling for an ambulance.

Of greatest use is an essay on the forensic evidence of the case by Professor Bernard Knight, a pathologist for the Home Office of the United Kingdom. He served from 1965 to 1996 and was a Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Knight performed an estimated 25,000 autopsies and reviewed the testimony from Dr. Frederic Moir Hanes about his examination of Smith Reynolds. Knight concluded that the evidence argued strongly against suicide. "It could not be self-inflicted" if Dr. Frederick Moir Hanes' testimony is accepted. Finding much fault with Hanes' testimony, Knight nonetheless accepts that the bullet entered high above the right temple and exited behind and below the left ear. Only Knight thinks the barrel of the gun was likely some distance from Smith's head. "Unfortunately, the gaps in the data make firm conclusions – always dangerous in forensic pathology – difficult to attain...Over-interpretation is a frequent sin."

Pompeo, Joe. *Blood & Ink: The Scandalous Jazz Age Double Murder that Hooked America on True Crime*. William Morrow/HarperCollins. New York, 2022.

This is a chronicle of a 1922 murder case in which a prominent minister married to a Johnson & Johnson heiress, having an affair with a singer in the church choir, was murdered beneath a crabapple tree. Its primary value is in its descriptions of America's first tabloid newspapers: the New York *Daily News* (which printed a 27-part series about the Holman-Reynolds-Walker case a decade later), Hearst's *Daily Mirror*, and the *Daily Home News*. Like the Reynolds case, the murder of Reverend Edward Hall was never conclusively solved. The author concludes, "But as with so many famous mysteries, it is the allure of the unknowable that draws us in. Would we be endlessly fascinated with Jack the Ripper if we knew who he was, or with Amelia Earhart if we knew how she disappeared?"

Reynolds, Patrick. *The Gilded Leaf: Triumph, Tragedy, and Tobacco: Three Generations of the R.J. Reynolds Family and Fortune*. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, 1989.

Author, actor, and activist Patrick Reynolds was born in 1948 to Richard Joshua "Dick" Reynolds, Jr. and Marianne O'Brien Reynolds. His parents divorced when he was a toddler and he rarely saw his father, who disinherited Patrick, his brother Michael, and

his four half-brothers, the sons of Elizabeth “Blitz” Dillard Reynolds. The prologue to *Gilded Leaf* states that Patrick realized at a 1975 family reunion that “he must now spend serious time and energy trying to come to terms with the conundrum of accumulation, dissipation, and **fatherlessness** [emphasis mine] that seemed to be the real heritage of the R.J. Reynolds tobacco family.” By the time of publication, Reynolds was three years into an anti-smoking campaign that began in 1986 and continues today.

While the book chronicles three generations, the central chapters covered his late uncle Smith’s marriage to Libby Holman and his subsequent death. For the most part, Reynolds repeats events described in the three biographies published earlier in the decade. He adds some broad conjectures, including the improbable notion that Libby married Smith as an “insurance policy” two years after the Wall Street Crash; in fact, she was earning more than Smith’s allowance, and per the terms of his father’s will, he would not come into his inheritance for another decade. Reynolds introduces un-sourced stories that seem apocryphal; Smith shooting at crystals in the chandelier in the reception hall, for example. He also makes psychological statements that exceed his expertise, as in “Modern psychologists have written that the lack of a father’s affection and an overbearing mother are often conditions that contribute to homosexual tendencies in men.” He appears to have access to documents that other biographers lacked. These include correspondence between Reynolds family members and Sheriff Transou Scott. Reynolds also claims that his father (Dick Reynolds) privately offered Libby a pay-off for her silence. We can hope that such documents will be shared publicly someday, ideally by joining the family papers in the Reynolda House Archives.

There is one fallacy in the book that has been especially persistent and pernicious. Reynolds and/or his co-author saw plans by Charles Barton Keen for a Cape Cod-style bungalow built in 1923 on the east side of Reynolda Road, at the north end of Reynolda Park. (Coliseum Road was later poured between this house and the Reynolda lawn; the house was razed in 2020). Keen’s plans identify it as a home for “Mrs. Johnston.” Perhaps seeking an option for the book as the next *Dynasty* or *Dallas*, the authors rashly inferred parental neglect by Katharine Reynolds Johnston of her teen-aged and pre-teen-aged children. “Rather than attempting to overcome the children’s understandable emotional resentment, the pair [Katharine and Edward Johnston] abandoned their responsibility, moving out of the bungalow and into one of the estate’s smaller cottages, leaving the children and their retainers alone in the big house. In a single stroke, they removed the last vestiges of direct parental supervision.” Patrick’s resentment about his and his brother Michael’s abandonment by their father, Dick Reynolds, is deserving of the reader’s sympathy, but this harsh judgment of his grandmother is based on a simple error: Mrs. Johnston was not Mrs. J. Edward Johnston but Mrs. *Lola* Johnston, Edward’s mother and Katharine’s mother-in-law. It’s true that Dick had difficulty accepting his father-in-law Edward; he was barely fifteen when Katharine remarried. But letters and diaries make it clear that the children lived with Katharine and Edward in New York and at Reynolda.

Despite these quibbles, I wouldn't dissuade anyone from reading *The Gilded Leaf*. A bitter tone persists throughout the book, that's true. Yet the reader sympathizes with Patrick's resentment and his indignation about the tobacco industry's concealment of scientific findings about the health costs of smoking. More importantly, *The Gilded Leaf* is engaging and intelligent in its chronicling of this family saga, which, whatever moral judgments may be passed in praise or censure, most readers will find alternately riveting, amusing, and poignant.

Additional note from archivist Bari Helms: "Patrick did consult our archives as they were when they were held at WFU. He showed up at ZSR Library with a lawyer and camera crew claiming that he was being denied access to the Reynolds Family Papers. The ZSR archivist responded that while WFU was the holder of the records, Reynolda, Inc. was the owner. Patrick was welcomed to request permission to access the records, the same as any other researcher.. This incident is documented in ZSR's provenance records that I obtained copies of a few years ago."

Reynolds, Z. Smith. *Log of Aeroplane NR-898W*. Reynolda House Museum of American Art, 2003.

The log/diary, of Smith Reynolds' three-and-a-half month journey may be easily read in one sitting. His observations are largely practical, but he took pains to record his amazement at such sights as the Taj Mahal and the Colosseum. Smith's sister, Nancy Susan Reynolds, had the log published in a limited edition following his death, commissioning an artist to create a map of his journey, whose route was Southampton-Croydon-Bonneval-Chartres-Le Bourget (Paris, where Lindbergh arrived in 1927)-Lyon-Marseille-Berre-Milan-Furbara-Rome-Naples-Tunis-Tripoli- Bengazi-Tobruch-Cairo-Heliopolis-Gaza-Baghdad-Basra-Persia-Jask-Gwadar-Karachi-Agra-Allahabad-Calcutta-Rangoon-Bangkok-Siam-Nape (Indochina)-Hanoi-Haiphong-Fort Bayard-Hong Kong. His niece, Barbara Babcock Millhouse, wrote an excellent introduction to the 2003 reprint of the book, which is available in the Museum Store. The introduction provides a brief history of aviation in Winston-Salem and its transformational impact on both Smith and his brother Dick. She concludes, "It is known that he had made plans to continue his studies in aeronautics at New York University, but the larger contribution that he hoped to make to aviation history, had he lived, can only be surmised."

Scheper, Jeanne. *Moving Performances: Divas, Iconicity, and Remembering the Modern Stage*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ, 2016.

Scheper devotes a fascinating chapter to "Voices within the Voice': Aural Passing and Libby Holman's Deracinated/Reracinated Sound." Her article is highly academic (can't you tell?), but it is also perceptive and far-reaching. One excerpt: "Holman was known not only for delivering blues-based material but for her fashionable deployment of racial indeterminacy. Through uninhibited swearing, drinking, and openly bisexual liaisons, she projected a bad-girl sexual appeal that attracted both genders. Holman's staging of an uncertain racial and sexual identity through sound and through practices of self-biographizing was amplified in the dramatic mini-narratives that framed many of her

early numbers as she performed mixed-raced characters in all-white revues. Those narratives, often deploying the genre of the tragic mulatta, can be read in concert with her own anecdotal stories about personal experiences with racial misidentification and passing. Together, they supply an ambivalent archive of competing narratives of racial ambiguity and pretense that shaped the production, consumption, and ways of remembering this torch song diva.”

The complete article will be made available in the packet of materials for interpreter training.

Schnakenberg, Heidi. *Kid Carolina: R. J. Reynolds Jr., a Tobacco Fortune, and the Mysterious Death of a Southern Icon*. Center Street. New York, 2010.

In her acknowledgements, Schnakenberg refers to research trips to the museums that have been established at Reynolds properties. However, she spoke to no staff members at Reynolda and spent not a minute in the Reynolda House Archives. (I can't speak to possible visits to Rock Spring Plantation or Sapelo). She proposes to write a fair biography of “a Southern icon, a father of American aviation, an internationally acclaimed yachtsman, and a pioneer in business, politics, and philanthropy.” However, her primary – and nearly sole – source was Reynolds's third wife, Muriel Greenough Reynolds, whom Reynolds divorced in order to marry his fourth and final wife, Annemarie Reynolds. Muriel believed that Annemarie murdered her husband, and Schnakenberg elevates this conspiracy on the slenderest of threads. (Incidentally, Annemarie Reynolds remained closely connected with Reynolda House, making annual donations and joining supporters on weeklong trips – hardly the behavior of a mercenary “black widow.”)

Center Street Press bills itself as “the publisher for Donald Trump, Jr., Gary Byrne, Newt Gingrich, Kris Paronto, Jeanine Pirro and more.” Most of these are ghost-written political memoirs. Center Street is an imprint of Hachette Book Group, and in this case they certainly published a “hatchet job.” I can't say whether the press was attracted to a demeaning treatment of a Democratic funder, who was treasurer of the Democratic National Committee and credited with major gifts that helped secure FDR's third term and Truman's 1948 win. (He also personally funded Roosevelt's series of fireside chats in 1939). But certainly the editorial department's comb is missing some teeth. Among scores of errors, I might mention that she confuses James Buchanan Duke of the American Tobacco Company with David Duke of the Ku Klux Klan. She also repeats Patrick Reynolds's claim that Katharine moved out and “coldly abandoned” her young children (see above).

This bibliography is focused on Smith. However it should be noted that Dick made the first contributions for the restoration of Old Salem, founded a marine research institute on Sapelo Island, and presided over the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation during the 1940s, addressing health needs for impoverished North Carolinians. As mayor of Winston-Salem in 1941, he secured federal housing funds to build safer and more sanitary housing for its poorest residents. His relationships with wives and children were

strained, to say the least, but I'll close with a statement from Stratton Coyner, his friend and attorney for thirty-three years. This is from an oral history taken in 1980, sixteen years after Dick's death from emphysema:

"Dick was a very well-read person, he was a very knowledgeable person. He had a great sense of fairness...He was a civil person, he was not snobbish in any way whatsoever. He always had a high regard for what we might call the ordinary man and his welfare. So he was just an admirable man, in a number of qualities. I enjoyed working with him very much over the years...The only bad quality that Dick had was that he had difficulty—drank too much at times. Otherwise he was a marvelous person....He had a weakness for whiskey all his life."

Wald, Elijah, *Josh White: Society Blues*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000.

Anyone interested in the history of folk and blues music will enjoy this carefully researched and sensitively written biography of a larger-than-life artist. White experienced homelessness and hunger as a child and was sent on the road with older musicians at the age of seven, collecting coins after their performances. While the musicians stayed in flophouses, Josh often slept in open fields. From these origins, he rose to be a major star of the folk revival, an actor in Hollywood films, and a friend and advisor to President Roosevelt, who was godfather to Josh White, Jr.

In the early 1940s, Libby approached Josh to help her learn to sing a more authentic form of American blues. Wald describes their artistic collaboration with a critical ear for the result of this unexpected pairing – the first interracial male-female duo in American music. Wald describes clubs at hotels where White was not permitted to stay. Libby picketed in front of one establishment in New York, shouting that the American flag at the hotel entrance might as well be a Nazi swastika. They toured through the 1940s, performing old ballads and blues and some new songs, including White's compositions and *Strange Fruit* by Lewis Allan (pseudonym for Abel Meeropol, who corresponded with Libby). A critic from the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that "a kind of molten mesmerism hung tingling in the throbbing air." To contemporary ears, it might be said that "you had to be there." The most lasting impact of the duo might be their arrangement of "House of the Risin' Sun," which was picked up by Dave van Ronk, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan before becoming a transitional folk rock hit in the version by The Animals. Van Ronk called *Society Blues* "the best book on American music I've read in years." Pete Seeger called it "a more complete and fair book than I would have believed possible."

Wilder, Robert. *Written on the Wind*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. New York, 1945.

A tobacco baron's family occupies a large estate a few miles outside of Winton in the county of Yadkin, North Carolina. Winton's residents refer to the estate and its occupants as "The Hill." A young retainer named Reese Benton (based on Ab Walker) lives on the property, performing odd jobs, but his real purpose is to keep his childhood friend, Cary Whitfield, from drinking too much and driving too fast. Reese is in love with Cary's wife,

Lillith. Lilith announces she is pregnant. Cary rages in jealousy. The next morning he is found dead.

Wilder set the book in his native North Carolina, and the novel's late patriarch, Cassius Whitfield, is based on aspects of both R.J. Reynolds and James Buchanan Duke. (The thrilling Douglas Sirk film adaptation, released a decade after the novel, moved the story to Texas oil country, anticipating legal action from Reynolds lawyers.) The novel and film are equally melodramatic; sadly, the book is out of print.

[A research project for the first taker: the character of the County Solicitor is named Chris Mayberry. Might the writers of *The Andy Griffith Show* have made a note of the name?]

Yurka, Blanche. *Bohemian Girl: Blanche Yurka's Theatrical Life*. Ohio University Press, Athens, 1970.

The actress Blanche Yurka met Libby Holman in the mid-1920s and came to Reynolda in June, 1932, to help her with elocution. At this time Libby harbored ambitions for a more serious dramatic career. Who better than the actress who played Gina in Ibsen's *Wild Duck* and Gertrude in *Hamlet* (opposite John Barrymore)? Yurka was sleeping in the west wing of the house when Smith was shot and helped carry him to a car, in which she held him in the backseat as Ab Walker drove them to the Baptist Hospital. Yurka makes no mention of her friendship with Libby or the incidents of July 1932. Rumor long had it that Libby paid for Blanche's silence; however, the Holman papers at Boston University reveal another explanation for her discretion. The papers include several letters from Blanche to Libby in 1969-70 as her autobiography was progressing. On February 18, 1969, Blanche wrote "Writing *Bohemian Girl* has been a long hard task...Sorry you are not in it as I had paid a quite beautiful tribute to your character and courage." It appears that Libby asked her not to include any reflections on Smith's death, even if they cast her in a flattering light.