

John Peter Zenger

Mrs. Graham Accepts Press Freedom Award

Katharine Graham, publisher of The Washington Post, said yesterday suggestions that the country might be better off "if the dispiriting facts" of the Watergate scandal had never been painstakingly unearthed are not in keeping with "the faith of a free people."

In a speech accepting the John Peter Zenger Freedom of the Press Award from the University of Arizona in Tucson, Mrs. Graham said there were "many moments of anxiety" at The Washington Post as government officials attacked the unfolding revelations of Watergate.

"For all the inherent skepticism which journalists acquire, there is still a very human desire to want to believe so-called authoritative spokesmen," she said, "and a very human tendency to become anxious when your stories, no matter how solidly grounded, are denied repeatedly and vehemently."

"In this respect we were probably somewhat naive," she continued. "For all the sad experience of recent years in Washington, we underestimated for a long time the capacity of government to hide and distort and push aside the truth. Nothing had prepared us, for instance, for Ron Ziegler's breathtaking admission that all statements of the pre-

vious 10 months were simply 'inoperative.'"

Mrs. Graham said the thesis that it's more important for an administration to "enjoy sufficient public trust to deal with the nation's other business" than to have its failings and offenses exposed is acceptable only "if one is willing to concede too much."

Things she is "not willing to concede," she said, include "that the American people can only withstand a certain limited number of shocks and a measured amount of disillusion" and "that national stability rests on national ignorance."

To suppress some news "if we deem it too bad or too unsettling is to make the press into the censor or the nursemaid of a weak and immature society," she said.