



AAC Publications

Thomas Callender Price Zimmermann, 1934–2024

T.C. Price Zimmerman seemed to live a charmed, or at least exceptional, life. He was, concurrently, president of the American Alpine Club and dean of the faculty at Davidson College. He had graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Williams College; studied at Oxford University, Harvard (Ph.D. 1964), and the University of Florence; and published an award-winning book on Paolo Giovio, a 16th-century bishop and historian in Italy. Price met his wife, Margaret Upham Ferris, at a dinner of AAC friends that she attended with her father, Dr. Benjamin Greeley Ferris Jr., the chair of the AAC's Safety Committee during the years *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* was created. The couple even had an asteroid, 22613 Callender, named after them.

Accomplished as he was, Zimmermann, who often went by "Price," was "a gentle and thoughtful soul—with a very wry sense of humor," said Jed Williamson, another past president of the AAC.

Margaret Zimmermann, in an email, recalled that fateful first dinner:

"Price, at 46, was still not married, which presented William Putnam, a longtime and very active AAC member, with the kind of challenge he loved. Putnam was also a longtime climbing buddy of my father's.... Putnam seated Price and me beside each other at the June 1980 surprise birthday party for Henry Hall," another AAC member. Margaret and Price were engaged two months later.

"We all remained good friends," she wrote, "and often saw each other, even in the mountains!"

In a Davidson College obituary, the dean at Reed College was quoted as saying of Zimmermann, "I don't know any faculty member who has better relations with students." Another Reed colleague called Price a quiet person of "unquestioned integrity and moral probity," while the president of Davidson referred to him as welcoming and supportive, "a unique and brilliant man."

Before arriving at Davidson College for the final stage of his long career, retiring in 2000, Zimmermann taught at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, from 1964 to 1977, and he climbed extensively in the Pacific Northwest. In 1970, he, Ed Johann, Theodore Nicolai, and Terry Simonitch made the first ascent of Mt. Skarland in Alaska's Hayes Range, via the northeast ridge, a high point of his climbing career. Zimmermann penned the humorous "April in Alaska" for the Mazama 1972 Annual on that ascent and an attempt on Mt. Hayes. The AAJ contains Nicolai's accounts of the Skarland climb and the East Face Direct of Mt. Jefferson in the Oregon Cascades.

Prior to serving as club president (1980–1982), Zimmermann chaired the Conservation Committee. According to the AAC website, as president he pushed through key policy statements on Mountaineering Ethics (1972), Mountaineering Access and Use of Public Lands (1974), Alpine Environmental Practices (1974), Management of the National Parks (1975), and Mining in National Parks and Wilderness Areas (1975).

He later wrote in a summation of his term, "Having previously been chair of the Conservation and Access Committee [which later became today's Access Fund], I was troubled by the Club's inability to lend significant material support to the activities it fostered, especially publishing, maintaining access, and granting climbing and research fellowships." He had resolved to increase the Club's endowment, but "we had to win back the confidence of our principal donors, which had been forfeited

by the raids on the endowment that had taken place in the past.”

He spearheaded a drive to compensate for previous losses to the endowment, which sparked an excellent giving record of 65 percent.

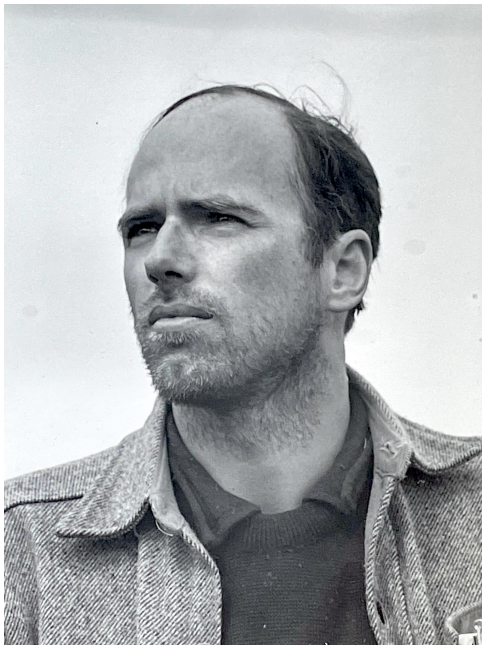
In a vast array of civic work, according to Who’s Who of Industry Leaders, he was an advisor to the Botanical Gardens at the University of North Carolina; a jury member, Rome Prize Jury, Post-classical Humanistic Studies, American Academy, Rome; a board member at Lowell Observatory (where Bill Putnam was longtime trustee), Flagstaff, Arizona; a board member at Opera Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina; a board member for the North Carolina Outward Bound School; and part of the Selection Committee for the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation at Princeton.

Asked to give a retrospective-and-prospective talk at the AAC Jubilee Dinner in Philadelphia in 1976, Price pulled lessons from the club’s long history. “Each successive generation has had the imagination and the grace to impart its wisdom to the next,” he said, “without necessarily imposing its will, to advise and support.... Thus successive generations of climbers, while separated by experience and technique, have been united in the comradeship of aspiration. And for an organization, that is the secret of perpetual youth.

“As a college professor I would be the last, the very last, to claim that the process of dealing with the coming generations is always a smooth or easy one, particularly when we have been experiencing a turbulent and disconcerting period in our national history.... But that should not be cause for undue alarm or make us doubt our future role, so long as we are prepared to accept it with the same dedication, the same patience, and the same mature wisdom which has blessed us since our inception.”

—Alison Osius

Images



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Article Details

Author	Alison Osius
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	In memoriam