

Toward a Better Future by Learning from the Past:

The online magazine “p’review” sets the scene for a Rotary conference concerning nationalism and discrimination

In the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the hundredth anniversary of the murder of countless blacks by a white mob, American President Joe Biden said at a commemoration in that city: “This is what great nations do. They come to terms with their dark sides.” An upcoming working conference sponsored by Rotary Service Clubs, an organization known throughout the world, will offer perspectives on this frequently painful undertaking. The conference, with the slogan “Nationalism, Then and Now – How to Shape the Future,” will take place in Northfield, Minnesota on May 23-27, 2022.

The current issue of the 55-page digital magazine *p’review*, “Peace. Inclusion. Equity,” has recently been published with the purpose of setting the scene for the conference, which will look both to the past and the future. The conference organizer is the historian Dr. Joachim (Yogi) Reppmann, who lives in Northfield and Flensburg and participates in the Rotary Clubs of both cities. He and Tony Conn, of the Rotary Club of Keokuk, Iowa initiated the five-day conference.

“The original impulse for me were the Keokuk Peace Letters,” Conn comments in explaining his strong interest in the program. They date back to the year 1932, a time that was shaped by the consequences of the global economic crisis and the specters of nationalism and totalitarian ideologies. At that time, Jewett Fulton of the RC Keokuk experienced these growing dangers personally at the Rotary Convention held in Vienna in 1931 and had subsequently traveled around Europe for several weeks. What he experienced was demoralizing; he was tormented by presentiments of where the political mood in Europe might lead.

Once back in the United States, he penned a passionate appeal for peace and freedom (“Let us smoke the peace pipe together”) and sent to all 504 Rotary Clubs that existed in the world at that time. Reppmann emphasizes that “this moving and timeless collection of letters revolves around two central fundamental values of Rotary: understanding among nations and dedication to world peace.” The October conference in Northfield is based on these fundamental values, which is why the title story of the richly illustrated *p’review* features the Keokuk Peace Letters. As Conn points out, “the rediscovery of these almost forgotten letters provided the initial spark for our idea of thinking in common about Rotary’s mission. Our concern is to bring into sharper focus the areas of peace and the prevention of conflicts.”

Conn and Reppmann find it heartening that, under the shadow of the murder of George Floyd by a policeman and the storming of the Capitol by a mob, Rotarians in the United States are looking to Germany for advice. Dr. Jim Hart of the Rotary Club of St. Paul, Minnesota wonders if Americans, by concerning themselves with the crimes of National Socialism, might learn something about the country’s own dark chapter of slavery. Many have also taken special interest in the “Stumbling Blocks,” of which 75,000 have been placed in front of dwellings in many German cities and towns. Their purpose is to commemorate those Jewish fellow citizens who were driven out or murdered during the Nazi period. The magazine contains an article on this Stumbling Block initiative, and well as one about a freight car that was used to transport Jews to extermination camps and is now on display at a museum in Minnesota.

Dr. Todd Thomson, President, RC Northfield, MN

About p'review online and details about the upcoming conference in Northfield, go to: www.peaceconference.us

For further information: yogireppmann@gmail.com & conn.anthony2013@gmail.com

The online magazine p'review is available at: www.LuLu.com