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VERMONT WAR CONVENTION 1917



The Shrine Theater on Wales Street, site of the state-wide World War I Rally held in Rutland on 27-28 September 1917.

The Vermont War Convention in 1917 provides an insight into the war effort at a grass roots level. Nearly three quarters of a century ago Rutland hosted the state conference in the Shrine Theater on Wales Street. Delegates from ten Rutland County towns pledged attendance. The theater was filled to seating capacity, with an additional 200 people standing. The **Rutland Herald** reported that over 3,000 Vermonters were attracted to the events. Subsequent satellite conventions were held in several locations throughout the state.

President Woodrow Wilson had established six great wartime agencies to aid in the war effort, among them the Food Administration, headed by Herbert Hoover. The program heightened awareness that people in the war-torn countries were starving. U.S. food conservation was encouraged by various means, including "meatless" and "wheatless" days and the development of the "clean plate" concept. Alexander Thompson, a representative of the federal administration spoke at the first session in Rutland. Congressman Julius Kahn of California spoke to the Rutland High School students at a school assembly.

The article that follows is from a 1925 issue of the old VERMONTER magazine. It is a report of the Thursday and Friday War Rally held in Rutland on 27-28 September 1917.

—The Editor



CHARLES RUSSELL CUMMINGS

Born: Newport, Vermont
24 December 1870

Died: Hartford, Vermont
25 November 1945

Charles Cummings was the author of the article reprinted in this issue of the Rutland Historical Society *Quarterly*. Mr. Cummings was the owner of THE VERMONTER magazine from December 1905 until 1945. He bought the magazine from Colonel Charles S. Forbes and merged it with his own popular eight page advertising sheet called THE INTER-STATE JOURNAL. The journal was largely patronized by merchants and businessmen in surrounding Vermont and New Hampshire towns. It was a monthly that had sold for fifty-cents a year!

Cummings learned his trade from his father at an early age. A perfectionist, he was actually the publisher, the editor,

typesetter, printer's devil, photographer, writer and artist. His wife, Minnie Dean Cummings, was trained to the craft and was an active and potent influence in what proved to be their life work. The monthly magazine was advertised as the state magazine. It had wide distribution at the subscription price of one dollar a year. THE VERMONTER was never a great money-maker, partly due to his underwriting the expense of publishing books in which he had an interest in the subject matter. He had to take much of his pay in satisfaction of a good job well done.

Cummings was ill with heart trouble only a short time before he died at the age of 75. His likely successor to the business was still serving in the army during WWII. Unavailable, publication of the magazine ceased, to be succeeded in 1946 with the state-supported VERMONT LIFE magazine.

The Vermont War Conventions

BY CHARLES B. CUMMINGS

The war conference at Rutland Sept. 27 and 28 was a great meeting to strengthen Vermont's resolve. It combined the best efforts of the Greater Vermont Association (heading the boards of trade), the Vermont Committee of Public Safety and the National Security League.

Great speakers were present, such as Vermont never heard before, authorized representatives of the allies and of our government, publicists and university professors. The world situation, in its latest phase, was clearly laid before us. The meeting furnished the enthusiasm for a series of meetings on war subjects in nine other counties, by other notable speakers, in October, and which was extended further by local volunteer speakers at every village and hamlet — culminating with a drive for observance of food conservation in which Vermont went literally over the top, with 3,261 signed pledge cards better than the expected 60,000.

The initial war conference was held in the Shrine Theater at Rutland. A great audience was present at each of the principal sessions, thrilled with the messages offered and responding spontaneously, topping climaxes by rising with hearty acclaim — a thing which occurred 19 times.

The stage was completely filled, after Vermont's manner of doing things, with our prominent men. It was jocosely said by Mr. James Hartness before the meeting that they "had reserved the stage for future governors but it was not big enough." The stage was beautifully decorated with international colors and with the Vermont state seal. The ushers were home guards in uniform.

It is unnecessary to follow the proceedings closely here. President F. H. Babbitt of the Greater Vermont Association was the usual tactful presiding officer. Mayor Brislin extended welcome. Governor Graham concisely stated the purpose of the meeting, Dr. Royokichi Iyenaga, Alexander Thompson, representative of Herbert Hoover, and James M. Beck of New York City spoke at the first meeting, Thursday afternoon.

In the evening Governor Graham presided and aptly introduced each speaker: General Emilie Guglielmatti, representative of Italy, Julius Kahn, Congressman from California, Dr. Iyenaga, Edouard de Billy, from France, and George Adam, representing Great Britain. It is with the addresses of these gentlemen that we are chiefly concerned, for their bearing on international questions. Dr. Iyenaga's addresses, one supplementary to the other, are here recorded in sequence.

Where Japan Stands

The address of Dr. Toyokichi Iyenaga was awaited with interest. He was a short, brown man who announced himself "a plain citizen." The statements which he launched with a good command of English and his evident unwillingness to depart far from the tenor of a manuscript to which he frequently referred, marked him to most listeners, an authorized spokesman for the Japanese embassy. He spoke rather loudly and with a broad, blatant intonation. He exhibited a consciousness of power, of reserve and dignity. The impression gained from what he *didn't* say was that the time might come when Japan would have to be recognized, with concessions, as a decisive factor in the war.

Dr. Iyenaga (it takes Mason Stone to pronounce it), is, it seems, a lecturer on political science at the University of Chicago and director of the east and west news bureau, New York. He said in part:

Japan entered the war in obedience to the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance which imposed upon her the duty of conducting military operations in common with her ally (Great Britain) in eastern Asia and of safeguarding mutual interests there. Japan entered into the agreement between the allied powers to make no separate peace,

but since the capture of the German stronghold in the Far East, Nov. 7, 1914, and the sweeping of enemy warships out of eastern seas, Japan has apparently been standing aloof from the conflict. While blood and treasure are expended on European battlefields Japan keeps her youth intact—a belligerent that has also made money out of the war.

The war has brought Japan a prosperity never known before. Her foreign trade has reached the billion mark. Her mills, shipyards and factories are busy day and night and are reaping enormous profits. Japan, though shouldering a great debt, is now lending some money to the Entente powers.

These benefits have come to Japan, a belligerent, by reason of her peculiar geographical position, the same as to the United States while the greatest neutral.

America has received material benefit on a vastly greater scale.

Japan's aid to the allies has consisted of the dispatch of a division of her army and the reduction of Tsingtec, in conjunction with British troops on Nov. 7, 1914, the dispatch of the first and second Japanese fleets and other squadrons to blockade the harbor of Kiaochow, to hunt enemy warships roving the adjoining seas, to capture their bases in the South Sea and to convoy the troops of Australia and New Zealand to Europe, entailing cruises of enormous length, a campaign of course as but child's play compared with the colossal battles fought in Europe and the arduous tasks of the allied fleets.

Japan's part has been done thoroughly and I may be pardoned when I say with a minimum of effort for a maximum of effect, the results secured being so far among the few aims of the allies that have been completely realized.

Dr. Iyenaga then pictured the conditions which would have existed but for Japan's aid: the insecurity of communication and commerce between Europe and the Far East, the withdrawal of part of the allied fleets to safeguard the road from Aden to Shanghai, the disturbance of tranquility in China, and of British interests in her Asiatic dominions. Japan is preserving peace in almost half the globe.

I can not let pass unchallenged the charge now and then made that Japan is indifferent to the cause of her allies because she is not fighting on European battlefields. It was neither the wish of her allies nor of Japan that she would thrust herself upon the European state, for it is none of her part to act therein. This is the strongest reason why she has not sent her troops to the European front to take an active part in the conflict. In the meantime she has done to her best ability that which is within her province to do. She has kept watch from the Yellow Sea to the Red and a large part of the Pacific. She has sent a fleet of destroyers to the Mediterranean, which was not in the agreement. She has subscribed to the loans of her allies to the full extent of her financial capacity. She has supplied munitions and supplies to the allies, and in quantities to Russia, piled high on the wharves of Vladivostock, owing to limited transportation overland.

While it is none of Japan's business to intrude herself upon the European battlefield, there are almost insurmountable difficulties in the way. The only alternative to the overtaxed Siberian railway would be to transport troops by sea. But where could we secure the required ships? In transporting a million soldiers probably four millions of tonnage would be required, in other words 1,000 ocean-going ships of 4,000 tons each, and a constant flow of military provisions must also be provided for. Japan has only about 70 ships of over 5,000 tonnage in her merchant marine fit for ocean voyage at present, which could be used for this purpose. Not only would much time be expended before the transportation program could be completed but meantime the commerce of the Far East with America and Europe would be completely paralyzed. Moreover it would be of far greater benefit to her allies, that Japan should, if she could dispense with it, divert some part of her shipping to the Atlantic for carrying foodstuffs and other necessities, rather than utilize the ships for transporting Japanese troops.

Japan stands ready to do everything in her power for successful prosecution of the war against a common foe. The nation that puts honor and loyalty first will never



Mayor Henry C. Brislin (1913-1914; 1917-1918) extended a welcome as the conference convened.

turn traitor to her allies or attempt to stab in the back another nation with which it is on the friendliest terms. (great applause and rising—cheers and applause! awoke his audience to a lively interest, finally, during the applause, Governor Graham arose and shook hands with the speaker.)

Quite contrary to Germany's expectation Japan hails with joy the entrance of the United States into the world struggle. For, in addition to the tremendous resources of the United States, which are bound to turn the scale of war on the side of the Entente Powers, there are special reasons for Japan in welcoming America. Both are similarly situated in regard to geographical position they occupy, the duties and functions they should occupy towards the allies, and the interests and aims they want to safeguard and realize. These considerations would naturally make America and Japan the closest of allies, both in war and at the peace conference of the future. Both are separated from Europe by a wide expanse of waters. Neither America nor Japan should, therefore, be interested in the remaking of the map of Europe. They are fighting but for their welfare. If the allied nations of Europe are brought to their knees by Prussianism, America and Japan would ultimately have to face it on their side of the waters. Both America and Japan are opposed to the conclusion of peace at the present moment, for such a peace would signify the triumph of Germany. They entertain no delusions as to the aims of Germany in tendering peace proposals. With Serbia crushed, Montenegro overrun, Rumania conquered, Turkey and Bulgaria the vassals of Germany, and Austria-Hungary bound hand and foot to her heels, the program Germany had formulated when she set Europe aflame, is measureably completed. The formula "Hamburg to Bagdad" is fairly on the way to realization. Were peace concluded on this basis, Germany would hold in her palm all southwestern Europe and she could easily, at the first opportunity, embark upon the next step of dominating Asia. She would be in an excellent position to strike Egypt, break the barrier between Turkey and Persia and lead her legions to the valleys of the Indus. After that, sooner or later, would come the turn of Japan to receive punishment for her audacity in unsheathing the sword against the greatest military power of Europe in 1914. Then we would see, in a more terrible form than before, the resurrection of the "mailed fist" policy in China, which once gave Kiaochoh and its hinterland to the Kaiser. Nothing then, it seems to me, could prevent a hegemony of the world, secure in the grasp of Germany. Could the United States, the wealthiest of nations, escape from inviting the cupidity of the present day Napoleon for despoilation or from being challenged as to the efficacy of the Monroe doctrine? America and Japan are fighting to prevent these untold catastrophies coming upon them.

We are fighting to make the reign of democracy safe in the world. We want the principles of humanity carried out in war and peace. Much ink has been spilt to place Japan in the ranks of autocracy and thus isolate her from her allies or cool their ardor toward her.