

Historian's Report: 2020

The first quarter began with the January Board Meeting. Meetings in February and March followed.

New initiatives for FFL were undertaken enthusiastically by the board as 2020 got underway. These included creating a more dynamic on-line presence for the club on Facebook and other Social Media and updating the club's website. The membership committee designed and distributed "business cards" for the members to hand out to friends and others interested in joining FFL. All in all, a high level of involvement by members of the board got the year off to a good start. The club's Newsletter "Passport" was published on-line on January 28.

One of the two inbound journeys scheduled for 2020 (from New Zealand) was cancelled in February but plans were well in hand to welcome a group from Orlando, Florida in May when the Corona Virus began to make its presence felt in the USA and that inbound journey had to be cancelled as well. Proposals for 2021 journeys were being discussed with nothing finalized before our lives were turned upside down.

Because of the Covid19/Corona Virus outbreak which began to impact life in the USA by the middle of March FFL and FFI had to adapt to the unusual circumstances provoked by the outbreak. The Board of Directors Meetings for April and May were shifted to an online video conference format. All FFL social activities were either cancelled (Breakfasts, LEO, Open World and Fulbright Dinners) or put on hold for the time being.

FFI sent out an urgent plea to local chapters for funds from the local chapters as its sources of income from across the world had come to a complete halt. The executive board of FFL proposed several initiatives which were discussed at the April board meeting and put into action. (More on this in the next quarter)

Membership in FFL dropped slightly for 2020 with 109 paid members as of March 2, 2020. A list of members was distributed to all in March.

The second quarter (April to June) saw our Nebraska Club confronted by the full force of the Coronavirus. All of the Club's activities—breakfasts, LOL, planned journeys and joint events with Open World had to be cancelled or postponed. Beginning in April the board began meeting monthly (except July) via Zoom. Second Saturday breakfasts were revived via Zoom in May. An on-line version of the club's Newsletter came out in May.

To keep the membership connected and updated as the pandemic persisted, the board organized a call-a-thon where each member of the board telephoned an assigned group of club members to make contact and to try to keep everyone engaged and up to date with Friendship Force. Calls were made three times over the summer.

FFI encountered financial difficulties when its sources of revenue were halted by lockdowns and travel restrictions. The Head Office appealed to member clubs for donations to tide the organization over. FFL generously donated a small surplus in its treasury and called upon the Lincoln membership to make individual donations as well. In all FFL's gift amounted to \$9,540.00. FFI also promoted many virtual activities focused on travel and virtual meetings between clubs and with foreign nationals across

the locked-down world. The topic of one of our call-a-thons was to tell our members about this opportunity and to provide the information for accessing the site.

FFL participated in an Open World meeting in July, virtually of course. The Russian delegates slated to visit Lincoln in April, 2020 met with a delegation from Lincoln including the Mayor and former senator Ben Nelson, and of course members of our board! The exchange lasted for two hours.

The AGM was scheduled to take place on August 30th but was changed to Saturday September 26th, 2020. It was held outdoors on the grounds of Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church. 45 Members attended. To allow the Board and the membership to meet by electronic means when necessary it was imperative to amend the Bylaws and consequently a vote was taken on these amendments. Following the meeting Chocolate treats were provided to all and Lorraine Riedesel, manager of the Beatrice Library gave an informative talk on the "1918 Pandemic".

"Re-inventing Our Club" and maintaining membership have been central to the club's leadership during the last months of 2020. COVID 19 having escalated rather than abated during the autumn has meant that retaining membership is central to the life and health of the club. To determine the needs of members at least two surveys have been conducted. Initiatives such as walking together (but socially distanced) in local parks drew some interest while the weather held. Outdoor tailgates were also suggested to be held on "game days". Virtual activities and a Pen Pal project were offered through the auspices of FFI and suggestions from other clubs were considered for virtual gatherings and entertainment.

One result of the membership surveys was clear. There was little interest in a Holiday Party this year. Most of the membership is not ready to brave a restaurant or group gathering indoors in 2020. In place of the annual holiday party, the Social Committee worked with the Center for People in Need to provide gift bags for The Holiday Gift to Others.

A fourth edition of the club's "Passport" Newsletter was published on-line in November. Photographs of the AGM and some member profiles made for interesting reading. Monthly Board meetings and Saturday Breakfasts continued throughout the quarter through the auspices of Zoom. The surveys mentioned above also indicated that there was a certain reluctance amongst some of the membership to Zoom, however it is one avenue of communication that has kept our club and others alive in 2020.

The greatest credit for keeping FFL flourishing so well in 2020 goes without doubt to our president Arlene Rea and the Friendship Board of Directors. This has been an extremely tough year for businesses, the arts and social organizations. Arlene and her team have devoted a great deal of time and energy to staying in touch both with FFL and with the national organization. Please join me in congratulating them on a job well done!

Mary Verschuur , Historian

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