Rhineland America House

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FIRST US Information Center to be established in the historic Rhineland and the first in the French Zone under the HICOG program to extend its information services to Germans throughout the Federal Republic, the Koblenz America House was dedicated June 7 with ceremonies in which German, French and American officials participated.

The Information Center was formally opened by Albert M. Doyle, US consul general in charge of the Frankfurt Consular District and supervising consul general in Germany. The principal address was made by Alfred V. Boerner, deputy director of the Office of Public Affairs, HICOG.

The basic theme of the ceremony was the vital necessity to international peace and understanding of the interchange of ideas, cultures and information by the peoples of the world.

IN THIS connection, several speakers recalled the centuries-long importance of Koblenz — situated at the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle rivers — as a meeting place where the world’s traders, travelers and learned men had exchanged not only goods but ideas and knowledge. They expressed the conviction that the new Information Center would be greatly aided in its mission by the traditional open-mindedness of the Rhineland.

Quoting Victor Hugo’s declaration that great rivers carry ideas with them, J. Rattaud, director of French cultural activities in the Rhineland-Palatinate, saluted the America House for being “not just a house of American propaganda but a place were the genuine exchange of ideas is promoted.”

German officials representing the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and the city of Koblenz greeted the new American installation as a means of bringing to the German people the breadth and scope of American thinking and experience. Speaking as the representative of Minister-President Peter Altmeier, Dr. Wilhelm Sommer, chief official of the Koblenz governmental district, saw the America House as “performing the work of interpreting America to the German people, since not everybody can visit the United States.” He declared that World War II would have been impossible had the German people, and especially Hitler and his “one-sided” advisers, possessed more knowledge of the potentials of the “continent with the inexhaustible possibilities.”

Dr. Hermann Wedell, director of the Koblenz Volkshochschule (adult education school), told the audience that he regarded the America House not as a competitor but as a colleague in the field of adult education and an “open door to the wide world.” Citing the Franco-German cultural exchange carried on under French sponsorship, Dr. Wedell said: “This America House will now make possible a wider field of education through knowledge of American culture and science.”

IN HIS address, Mr. Boerner traced the modern paradox of great technical advances that shrink distances between nations and the simultaneous growth of intellectual and spiritual barriers between the peoples of the world. Declaring that it was the substitution of egotistic nationalism and naked force for cooperation and mutual

Alfred V. Boerner (left), who delivered the principal address at the opening of the America House in Koblenz, inspects the center with Henry A. Dunlap (center), chief of HICOG’s Information Centers Advisory Staff, and Mrs. Sofie Bernard, director of the center.
understanding that had led to the catastrophe of the recent war and its consequences, he pointed out that the function of the America House was not only to deepen the cultural and human relations between Germany and the United States but to help in the realization of a general European understanding and cultural cooperation.

Mr. Boerner contrasted the efforts of the West to achieve peace and understanding in the postwar period with the course taken by the rules of the East.

"In the West we demobilized our armies and set to work to rebuild a heavily damaged world. But those in power in the East wanted nothing of free cooperation, of the free exchange of ideas, of the free flight of man's spirit. Having raised themselves to power on the fists of force, they feared the strength of free thought and the free word. So, once again, the isolation of an entire people from the rest of the world was begun. Once again, the borders of the free world were confronted with deep chasms, with symbols of hate, and finally with the Iron Curtain. Then, despite the lessons of the war just ended, naked force and aggression again emerged."

Under these circumstances, the speaker said, the free world realized that it was sufficient only to want peace and began the difficult task of defending itself against the new threat. He declared, "Peace must be secured and defended until all peoples of the world realize that war and aggression are an unprofitable game. And this can only be accomplished by free cooperation supported by the sincere wish to keep and protect the freedom of the human spirit."

INVITING the citizens of Koblenz to use the America House facilities to the fullest, Mr. Boerner requested them to make known their suggestions and wishes in order to help the America House in its mission of furthering cooperation and understanding.

"European integration, the spiritual and cultural unity of the Western peoples, and their cooperation in all areas of freedom are a goal so great that we must spare no effort to reach it," the American speaker asserted.

Also participating in the dedication ceremony were George Selke, chief of the Cultural Affairs Advisory Staff, HICOG; Henry Dunlap, chief of the Information Centers Advisory Staff; and Dr. Max Grossman, public affairs officer of the Frankfurt Consulate General. Mrs. Sofie Bernard, director of the Koblenz America House, presided at the ceremony.

The Koblenz America House occupies an entire section of a newly erected building. Among the services offered in the three floors of the institution are a 7,000-book main library, a youth library of 2,000 volumes, an auditorium with stage and motion picture projection facilities, a periodical room and a 700-film picture library. All furniture and furnishings were designed specially for the new institution.

In the first month of its operation, the new America House has been used by the citizens of Koblenz to an extent indicating whole-hearted acceptance of the invitation extended at the opening ceremony. Library users during this period numbered 16,747, attendance at film showings totaled 4,414 persons while lectures and concerts drew 1,900 visitors.