



## **A Tribute to John C. Kern**

**May 22, 1925 – Jan. 20, 2019**

### **Great man, great soul, great server**

For TOS members around the world, John C. Kern's name was perhaps first and foremost associated with the matching grant the Foundation has offered the TOS in America since 2008 in support of the theosophically-oriented Golden Link College (GLC) in the Philippines. John was directly behind this initiative and followed the college's growth with great interest, as he did all Foundation-supported projects.

John's exchange with Vic Hao Chin, Jr. in 2011 exemplifies the infectious enthusiasm that was so encouraging to beneficiaries of the Foundation:



*John Kern: I have finally turned on my laptop and can in this modest way begin to express our absolute delight in every aspect of this project, its handling, administration, the involvement of our American Section of the TOS, and you, Vic, at the helm. This project is a glorious example of how the various scattered parts of the Theosophical Society's most dedicated workers can come together in support of applying the theosophical philosophy in the service of humanity, anywhere, anytime, in a manner which will contribute to the general welfare. Your very gracious dedication plaque honours those who saw the potential of this Theosophical College.*



*Vic Hao Chin Jr: The Kern Matching Grant has actually given us a much-needed adrenaline boost because we were at a juncture when we had to expand our facilities for the opening of the tertiary courses, but the investment requirement was quite large, and it was difficult for us to do it by ourselves. Your offer came just at the right moment and we were able to get past a major hump in our growth.*



*John: What has been so significant about this project is how each person involved has seen an opportunity, and each has responded with thoughtfulness, energy, transparency in the fund raising, and complete dedication to the objective. No personal agendas got in the way. Above all, this project has been an opportunity to press forward on my own long held goal of seeing a re-unification of the TOS function with the TS function. We may need to be separate organisationally, but we must be one in spirit and endeavour.*

*Through the publicity arranged about the expansion of the Golden Link College, we may hopefully encourage new donors to join us and even inspire some people to consider more significant contributions. We are applying fundamental theosophical principles in bringing together peoples of vastly different cultural and societal backgrounds in the expression of sensitivity to our planet and all its inhabitants. For many who are not aware of theosophy or the Society, their approach to theosophy may well be encouraged by demonstrations of practical, every-day service in situations of need. The TOS is a vital tool in organising folks to undertake service projects, aided by members' understanding of theosophy which provides such a convincing explanation for why this sort of service to others demonstrates losing our focus on ourselves through service to others, and in the process ultimately finding our own focus on why we are here in the first place.*

This thoughtful, warm and supportive correspondence from John is typical of his work as Kern Foundation representative and reflects his passionate caring for Theosophy. His idea of a matching grant for the GLC was an inspired one. An international TOS worker involved in fundraising mentions its effects:

*There is something very encouraging about receiving a matching grant. It shows confidence in the capacity of the staff at the Golden Link College to construct a theosophically-oriented educational establishment. Further, the grant has helped strengthen the international identity of the TOS. For the first time we have a project for which consistent international cooperation is needed over an extended period. Real efforts are required to coordinate the collection of donations to reach our target and qualify for the matching grant each year. This helps bond us. The TOS is very grateful to The Kern Foundation and particularly to John.*



*Plaque honouring the contributions of the Kern Foundation to the development of the Golden Link College*



Here we see John C. Kern with Nancy Secret, TOS International Secretary and International Treasurer of the TS. Nancy collaborated extensively with John over many years. She felt great respect for him.

*Nancy writes: At a time when the TOS and TS collaborated less closely than they do now, John instinctively saw the TOS's potential for helping the TS to show the light that Theosophy sheds on daily life and major issues affecting the planet. He saw service as Theosophy in action and an unparalleled means of reaching out to one and all.*



*Herbert A. Kern, John's father, provided an example of philanthropy that greatly inspired his son.*

John preferred to give great credit to his father, Herbert A. Kern, Sr for the reach of the foundation. He talked about him frequently. In an article in *Quest* magazine (Sept. – Oct. 2007) entitled *Personal Reminiscences on the Origins of The Kern Foundation*, John wrote:

*My father had a vision for enabling Theosophy to become a vital part of the lives of many more than those who might accidentally come across books on Theosophy, as he had. The first major program The Kern Foundation supported at the TSA was the Quest Books publishing venture, his dream of aiding in the prospects for many more persons coming in contact with up-dated, contemporary Theosophical literature.*

*[...] Theosophy's message about being responsible for one's actions and their effects upon others resonated with my father's own informal style. He established profit sharing, medical expense coverage, retirement pensions, an employee stock purchase plan, and other programs geared towards developing partnerships with all involved in his company. He saw each person as having a vital role to play in the success of the total enterprise: from the employees, all of whom he knew on a first name basis during the early years and whom he*

*felt should be compensated on a fair and equitable basis; to the stockholders who provided the capital to start and run the business; as well as the company's customers and suppliers.*

*One personal case I recall vividly, as I knew the individual well, was one of my father's department heads, Mr Moriarty, who contracted adult poliomyelitis. This employee's prognosis was eventual total paralysis. My father arranged for Mr Moriarty to have almost daily treatments by our family osteopath. Dr Evans massaged and manipulated Mr Moriarty's limbs to maintain their muscle tone, and after ten years (at full salary) Mr Moriarty returned to his office at the company, same job, albeit in a wheel chair!*



John was always one to acknowledge the contributions of others in addition to those of his father. He commented: *Joy Mills, who had just become president of the TSA when the foundation was activated in 1966, was a tremendous support as we created the first programs to receive grants.*

### **Impatient to See Him**

Appreciative comments of John himself abound. A TOS worker who lived at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in California throughout the 1980s shares reminiscences of the many years John flew around the United States, meeting with the boards of organisations whose projects the Kern Foundation was nurturing:

*In helping to develop grant programs, there never was a more youthfully keen, forward-thinking, innovative and yet discerning ambassador than John. He was such a keen analyst of future trends that he often himself showed the way to TS leaders concerning progressive possibilities for the functioning and outreach of the Society. We young workers at Krotona used to await John's three-monthly visits with impatience. With his sharp, open mind and optimist outlook, his presence brought a breath of fresh air to a community that seemed to its younger residents to be a little on the conservative side. How many changes came about simply through John's visits! We witnessed him in action at board meetings at Krotona and at those of other grant recipient organisations in California. It was always wonderful to see his acute intelligence at play and the great command of language that enabled him to express himself with subtlety and sensitivity. Service to all was surely his guiding star.*



At a personal level, John would surely say that Anne, his beloved wife of six decades, was his guiding star! His devotion to her was legendary. A warm and gracious person, she too has spent her life actively involved in service to the community, both with John and independently.

Examples of Anne's activities:

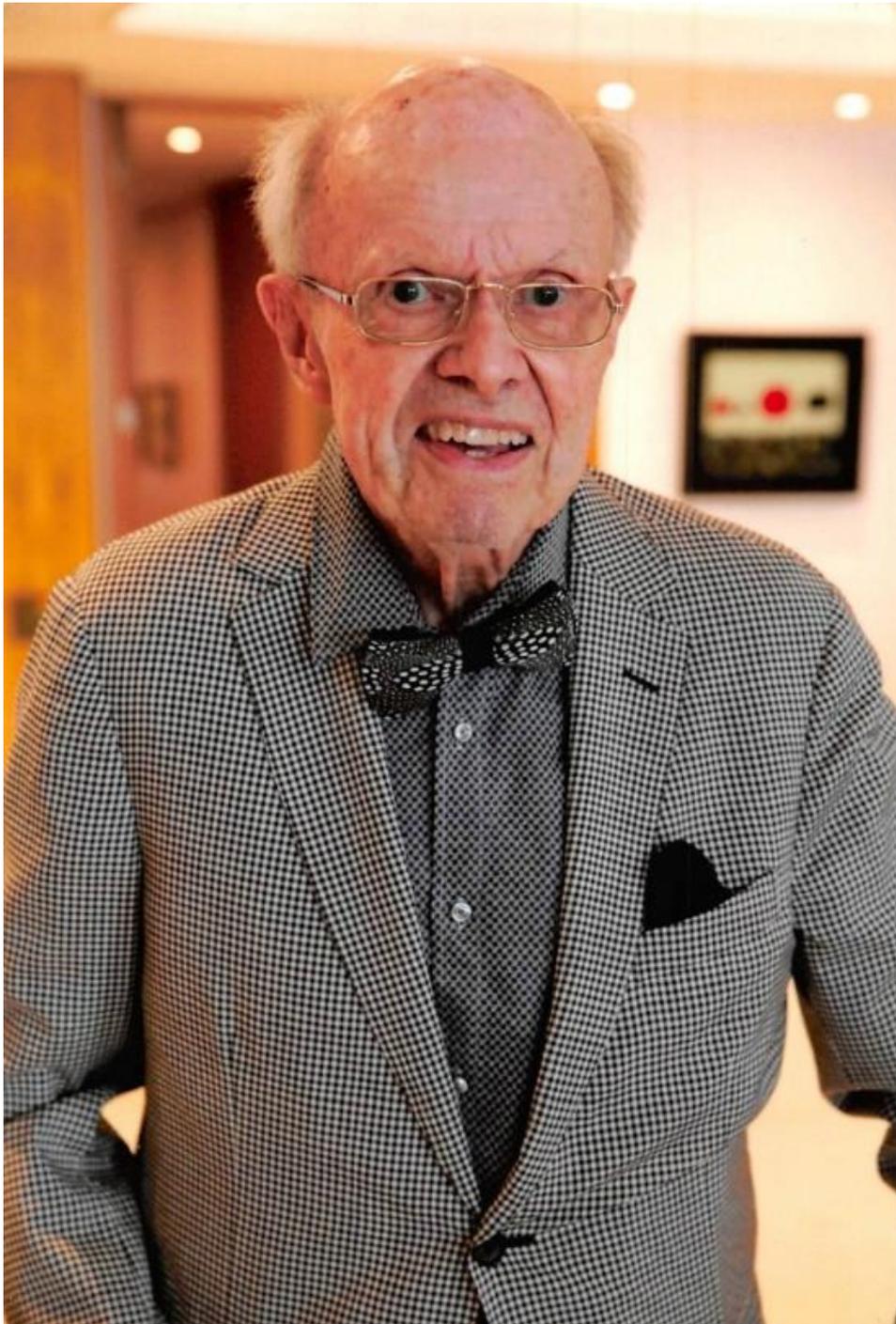
- Life trustee of Chicago Symphony
- Former chair of Art Institute Sustaining Fellows Program
- On women's boards of University of Chicago and Northwestern University
- On Visiting Committee of Regenstein Library (at University of Chicago)
- She and John gathered and redistributed works of art - ceramics, paintings, sculptures, and others. Their collection was wide and diverse but emphasized modern and abstract artists.

We hold you closely in our thoughts, Anne.

Godspeed to you, John, for your onward journey.

As Betty Bland said upon learning of your passing,

thanks for everything!



John C. Kern was quite simply one the greatest philanthropists the TS and TOS have known in many decades. His immense vitality shone through his eyes to the last.