



Spinoфф

ROTARY CLUB OF WEST OTTAWA

Marcia Armstrong, President

March 12, 2024 Reporter: Don Butler

This meeting was Zoom only

Program: Peter J Thomas- Rescuing the Timbuktu manuscripts

Meeting video: <https://youtu.be/XG443-moVVs>

We open:

President Marcia Armstrong welcomed us to the 35^h meeting of this 120th Rotary year. As we gather virtually, with most of us doing so on the unceded territory of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe people, let's be always mindful of their experience in the story of Canada. Learn about it, understand it, and act to make change.

Guests:

President Marcia welcomed guest speaker Peter Thomas.

37 members and three guests attended on-line. Guests in addition to our speaker were Linda Roehrl and for the third or fourth time, Murtaza.

O Canada video: a four part harmon done by a male singer making four tracks

Presentation:

Introducing speaker Peter Thomas, **Andrew Young** told us he had met Peter several years ago at his supper club. Peter has an MA in history from Trinity College Dublin. He had worked in the banking sector and information management. Since retirement he has written short papers on several subjects which interest him, including a US family with blue skin, the first people in America and the manuscripts of Timbuktu about which he would tell us today.

Peter started by saying he had not been to Timbuktu and what he would tell us was based on research. With a series of slides Peter continued that Timbuktu had been founded in the 11th century and was a major centre of trade and later also. of culture and teaching. It was part of the Mali empire from the 13th to the 16th Century. In Europe it had near mythical status. Explorer Andrew Gordon Laing was the first Christian to reach Timbuktu which he did in 1826. Timbuktu wealth was legendary. Mali ruler Mansa Musa is said to have distributed so much gold in Cairo while on the Haj that the Cairo economy collapsed. The wealth came from trade in salt, gold, ivory, slaves and cola nuts etc. The salt came from dried up lakes north of Timbuktu and the gold which paid for the salt came from panning the rivers of Sierra Leone, Guinea and other west African countries.

Islam was brought to Timbuktu by Muslim traders coming from the east. The first mosque was built in the early 12th century. Then came schools and teachers at various levels of scholarship.

Three major mosques formed a scholastic community and are now referred to as the university of Timbuktu. Arabic became the language of literacy. Traders do not like war and fighting so the form of Islam was moderate. So there were different schools and different teachers of Islam. Teachers would ask the traders to bring back documents showing the thinking in other cultural centres in the Muslim world. As Islam covers all aspects of life the documentation and the teaching extended to philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and other sciences as well as religion. Teachers had their own libraries which were handed down through their families. Some documents were well kept and some moldered away. In about 1980 there was realization that these manuscripts were valuable and later, Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa funded the University of Cape Town to offer programs focused on African culture using these manuscripts. UNESCO designated the manuscripts as part of World Heritage. Other support for African studies came from Europe. A Mali National Institute was set up to study and research Islamic culture and the manuscripts. There was support for the families who owned the manuscripts as descendants of the teachers who had collected them.

In 2012 Timbuktu came under the control of Islamic extremists associated with Al Qaeda. As the manuscripts reflected a variety of interpretations of Islam and the extremists recognize only their own they set out to destroy the manuscripts.

Mausoleums of Muslim holy men were considered un-Islamic and destroyed.

Abdel Kader Haidara was the owner of one of the major Timbuktu libraries. He led an initiative to smuggle the libraries out of Timbuktu using whatever transport was

available. As Bamako was still in government hands most of the manuscripts ended up there. Safe in air-conditioned facilities the next step was to categorise them, index them, translate them and make them accessible to scholars. Major support in this has come from Google Arts, the Hill Museum in Minnesota, the Library of Congress and Lyon University.

Ultimately the objective is to return the manuscripts to their owners. Peter said Timbuktu itself is now plagued by vandalism, kidnapping and much of what was worth seeing is now destroyed. Visiting is now too dangerous.

Q&A

Don Butler asked what the manuscripts tell us that we did not already know. Peter answered that they would expand the understanding of Islam and the culture of the period as they cover so many different aspects.

Answering **Andrew Young** Peter said the bulk of the work now being done is digitising the manuscripts to make them more accessible.

Chris Braeuel thanked Peter for his presentation and told us that he was in Mali in 2009 at the time of the kidnapping of the two diplomats. He had been there for the annual music festival in the desert.

Gaye Moffett asked if there was an actual plan to return the manuscripts. Peter answered as Mali now has a military government the situation is one of wait and see.

Caroline DeWitt asked Peter about copyright and property rights for the manuscripts. Peter said that the text is being copied by Google and the Library of Congress and others. Ownership of the manuscripts themselves is still with the families. **Andrew Young** added Timbuktu distribution of ownership amongst the various families gives some protection.

Andrew thanked Peter telling him of our donation to End Polio to mark his visit.

Announcements

Earth Day is April 22 and **Caroline DeWitt** announced that the clean-up event would take place at the Brewer Park lot Saturday April 20 from 10:00 AM to noon. **Sucha Mann** will have T-shirts yellow vests and pick up sticks. Last year we picked up 10 bags of trash and hope to do more this year.

Bob Harrison reminded us to get our Rotary Award nominations in. He reviewed the Family and Community Service award and the Lloyd Loynes trophy for volunteer services, the Ruth Martin award and the certificates received by Rotary and non Rotary winners of the Paul Harris Fellow awards, Ask any Awards Committee member for criteria and nomination forms. Submit by March 31

Soc and Rec

Ron Doll reminded us of the Saint Patrick's celebration Saturday the 16th at Connor's Irish Pub

He said our solar eclipse watch party April 8 would probably be local. Astronomer Gary Boyle who will be speaker April 2 said that in Ottawa we'll see about 99% of the eclipse.

President Marcia reminded us of the farewell event for **Ken** and Glenda **Murray** on March 26 at Saint Elias. Let **Jean Begin** know if you are attending.

-Re Visitors Day May 28 think about who you'd like to invite as potential members

-Dealing with Mental health issues in our children event April 27. At Saint Paul University From 8:30 to 1:00 PM. Please spread the word.

You can invite people through Facebook. <https://rcwo.org/events/mental-health-event-how-do-i-recognize-mental-health-issues-in-my-child/>

We will be hearing from Michelle Crogie, Executive Director, Parents Lifeline of Eastern Ontario

PLEO gives peer support to parents experiencing mental health issues with their children.

President Marcia then closed the meeting.

Cash Calendar winners

<https://www.ottawarotarycalendar.com/2024-winners.html>

Next Meeting

Zoom only

Tuesday March 19

“Doors open” 12:00. Meeting proper starts @ 12:30

Speaker: Michelle Crogie, Executive Director of Parents Lifeline of Eastern Ontario

Intro & Thanks **Ginette Thomas**

Spinoff: **Don Butler**

Meeting log-in info: See meeting invitation or see rcwo.org for Club contacts.

NB Hybrid meetings planned to restart April 2