

# GEOLOGIC PAST

## *Highlighting articles from past issues of GSA Bulletin*

### **“The Role of Minerals in the Present International Situation”**

**C.K. Leith**, *GSA Bulletin*, March 1939

This essay by C.K. Leith (*GSA Bulletin*, v. 50, p. 433–442) is derived from his Anniversary Day address at GSA’s semicentennial celebration in December 1938. Leith summarizes the “recent efforts of Germany, Italy, and Japan to improve their mineral positions” (p. 435) and examines possible solutions to the mineral resource problems faced by these and other “have not” nations.

“The inequalities of mineral distribution among the nations are stubborn facts which cannot be greatly changed by wishful thinking or political measures,” he writes (p. 439). The United States was not immune to these inequalities: Although the United States was the “world’s largest producer, the largest consumer, and the largest distributor of minerals and their products” (p. 441), its mineral-resource deficiencies (especially “in the ferro-alloy group”) barred the country from self-sufficiency. According to Leith, “If all our imports were cut off, our industry would indeed return to the ‘horse and buggy’ days. We could build neither automobile nor a battleship” (p. 441). Leith continues, “The ramifications of use of all these minerals are so complex in modern industry that the *lack of a single one* often has far-reaching consequences” (p. 442; italics added).

In closing, Leith calls for the United States and “other democratic nations” to not only focus on the defense of their “material and ideologic position” but also on “alleviating the raw material grievances of the ‘have not’ nations in the interest of world

welfare and peace” (p. 442). The role of geologists, he writes, is not to “settle these questions” but to “make highly significant contributions to both the immediate problem and the long-range problem of using our mineral power in trust for the world welfare.” The essay’s concluding sentence warns that this “responsibility should not be avoided” (p. 442).



Charles Kenneth (C.K.) Leith (1875–1956) was president of the Society of Economic Geologists (SEG) in 1925 and of GSA in 1933 and received Penrose Medals from both societies. Leith was head of the University of Wisconsin–Madison geology department for 31 years (having performed graduate work there in 1902 and retiring in 1945), and, after retirement, was a member of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission’s Combined Development Agency. Among his many papers and books, Leith wrote “The Economic Aspects of Geology” (1921, New York, H. Holt and Company, xv, 457 p. illus. 22 cm, 1921), which was recently re-released as an eBook by Project Gutenberg for free download or online viewing at [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1066580](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1066580).