

History of Chatham Rotary Club by Jack Beardall

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For more information on Jack, [Ctrl-Click Here](#) (ed.)

Rotary International was founded in 1905, and after World War I many problems of adjustment had to be made and thoughtful men faced the future with a determination to promote world-wide fellowship, which seemed to set the stage in harmony with the principals of Rotary.

On September 22nd, 1921, such a group, under the chairmanship of R .L. Stratton, gathered in the chambers of Judge Ward Stanworth, Harrison Hall, to discuss the possibility of organization of a Rotary Club in Chatham.

Charter Night was held in the Sanita Hotel where the Thames Theatre now stands, and Charter No. 1011 was presented to the Chatham Club under the sponsorship of the London Rotary Club and part of Rotary District No.23. Twenty-five members were inducted by District Governor Geo. E. Barnes of Philadelphia, Penn., however I should state that due to unforeseen circumstances, the actual presentation of the Charter was not made until Feb. 22nd, 1922, in conjunction with the celebrating of the 17th Anniversary of Rotary International. Only two of the original Charter Members are still active in our Club today: Wm. M. Gray and S. J. Smith; three others who are still living are Austin McLeish, our first Secretary; Howard Taylor, a Past President and Ted Sulman, who resigned from the Club years ago.

The committee system was inaugurated in 1923 with 8 committees. These have expanded under the 4 avenues of service into 23 committees and the latest addition is the Club Archivist, Jack Beardall, who was appointed July 1st, 1962. Today we have a President, Vice-President, 5 Directors, a Secretary and Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and Sergeant-at-Arms, Rotominder Editor and a Membership of 121 with the possibility of 5 new Members in the near future. The first Luncheons were held in the Chamber of Commerce Building, on the corner of Wellington St. West and Market Square East. Later, they moved to the Gray-Dort Club Rooms, now the Masonic Temple. Since 1930, these Luncheons have been held in the Princess Marina Room of the William Pitt Hotel.

Our club has been a part of six different districts, starting out in the 9th District (1921 & 22)... on to 638th District (1957 to now). Today there are 48 Clubs in 638; 40 in the State of Michigan, covering the Counties of Macomb, Oakland and Washtenaw and in Canada, the 8 Clubs of Kent County, with a District membership of nearly 2,300. Our present District Governor, John E. Farrell of St. Clair Shores Club, Michigan, is the 49th Governor of this District. Canada has contributed 5 District Governors. In 1935 Wm. M. Grey, Chatham; 1940 Dr. Del Marr, Ridgetown; 1952 Alan Brander, Wallaceburg; 1956 G. Clarence Nichols, Blenheim; 1960 Dr. John R. MacPherson, Ridgetown; and further, in 1966 Nominee-Elect Proctor A. Dick, Chatham.

During the first 7 years, minutes of every meeting were kept and approved, but since 1928, the only records available were through the Rotominder. Minutes of the Directors' Meetings are still kept in brief, but are not passed on in full to the Membership. The Club Rotominder has always been one of the banner publications of the District and has had only three Editors - the late Harry Thomas (25 years

until 1952), Proctor A. Dick (11 years 1952 to 1963) and Harry Morgan presently. Harry Thomas and Proctor Dick also served as Club Secretaries, Harry Thomas 1922 – 1947 and Proctor Dick from 1947 until the present.

Through the years, Summer Meetings have been held at the homes of Bruce Bradley, Harry Pugh, Shirley Holmes, Perc. And Jack Chinnick, Bob Perry, Nap King and Sil Corsini. For many years past our Club has held special events which include: the serving of Christmas at the Thamesview Lodge and Victoria Home with our Members acting as waiters since 1921; Dinner our Children's Party at Christmas for our Members' children and grandchildren; Easter Party for handicapped children; Hallowe'en Party at the schools and the broadcasting of Christmas Carols by our Club, taped in advance for broadcast over CFCO on Christmas morning.

Rotary pins were first available in 1922 and were specified to "be of Canadian manufacture". On our Silver Anniversary in 1946 Harry Thomas and E. C. Steele presented the Club with a gong and gavel, while Jack Beardall, Bill Gray and Shirley presented the Club with a modern speech amplification system which is operated by remote control from a member's table. In 1957 the latter trio followed through and presented a rostrum complete with reading lights, timer and microphone. In 1964, Jack Beardall presented the Club with a fine oil reproduction of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, making the toasting to her more realistic

A Rotary Fair was held at the Armouries for several years with Geo. R. Cummings as Manager, but when World War II started, the Armouries was no longer available for this purpose. Our first \$10.00 Banquet was in 1940 and was given a tremendous start by R. L. Bevan – our last \$10.00 Banquet was the 25th and we raised \$3,800 – the largest amount in 25 years. The origin of these Banquets was the brain wave of the late editor of the Chatham Daily News, R. W. Angus.

The Rotary Club of Chatham is the Senior Service Club in the city, being organized in 1921; the Kinsman Club in 1928; Kiwanis Club in 1930; Optimist in 1937; Jaycees in 1949; Lions in 1949; Sertoma in 1952; Maple City Kiwanis in 1961. Our Club has always endeavoured to further the influence of Rotary in our District and gave valuable assistance in organizing Clubs in Blenheim, Thamesville, Tilbury and Wallaceburg. We can also claim, as our grandchildren, the Clubs in Ridgetown, Bothwell and Merlin.

Our Club has had some very talented musicians among its members who have assisted at the piano: Lou Challinor, John Allen, Harry Hirst, Jack Willard, Whitney Scherer, Jimmy Dunn, Jim Millman, Wilf Davidson, and at present the reliable Joe Emmott. Geo. Cummings, Stewart Douglas and Ron McGregor have acted as song leaders over the years.

Phil Coate first chaired our Crippled Children Committee which was formed soon after the Club was organized. He was succeeded by E. C. Steele who was the President of the Ontario Society for Crippled Children in the late 1940's, then by the late Stewart Douglas. Since 1958 Bill Poile has ably carried on. In 1951 we undertook to manage the Easter Seal Campaign and Don Rispin and his office staff initially worked many hours mailing the appeal letters to all city homes from a list supplied by our local Hydro office. In recent years Rotary Anns have been invited to a regular Club Luncheon and afterwards remained to stuff the envelopes ready for mailing. This year, 1964, we mailed 11,564 envelopes (a stamp cost 3¢ -ed) and since 1959 our Rotarian Postmaster has given valuable assistance to the Committee. The amount raised in 1964 was \$9,134.00 – the largest amount in 14 years.

Our Youth Work started in 1922, guided by Howard Taylor and K. L. Stratton. Later, Harry Thomas carried on for many years with his famous "Knights of St. Andrew". Later again, we turned our attention to Junior Hockey and the word "Rotary" is still in the shirts of a Juvenile team today. Since 1948 we have sponsored, in conjunction with the Y.M.C.A., the Hobby Show, which has had as many as a thousand exhibits. S. J. Smith who was President of our Club in 1931-32 formed a "Better Sugar Beet Club" in 1930, and was instrumental in starting the Rural Urban Night. In 1929 Jim Gray and Phil Coate organized the Chatham Branch of the Victorian Order of Nurses. In 1948 our then President Proctor Dick, with Grant Thompson, organized the Cancer Society.

Starting in 1954 N.A.T.O. Airforce Cadets have been the guests of the Club for a day, attending our Luncheon and a Maroon Hockey Game as an Annual Event. Several other visiting foreign groups have attended our luncheons as our guests. In 1957 some 30 foreign students were guests of the Club and stayed overnight at homes of our Members. Since then it has been an Annual Affair.

The most spectacular Rotary event ever held in Kent County was the District Conference of 1939, when our own Bill Gray was General Chairman and Roy A. Plumb of Hamtramck, Michigan was District Governor. The main Banquet was held at the Chatham Armories and just a few short of 1,000 Rotarians and Rotary Anns sat down for supper. The special guest speaker was Hon. Howard Ferguson. The catering for this vast affair was by the combined services of the Women's Societies of all the Chatham Churches and even to this day that notable event is still often mentioned. After all expenses in connection with the Banquet were paid, the Chatham Club had a profit of \$500.00. However soon after that, a new ruling stated that all profit from a District Conference was to be turned in to the District Fund.

Only two Members have served as President for more than one year: R. L. Stratton 1921-22 and Proctor Dick 1947-48. Our present President Frank Gee, is our 43rd President. For 41 years the Club operated without a local set of Bylaws and the credit goes to Past President Larry O'Conner, who had them written and approved by the Membership in 1963.

Two Rotary International Regulations which plague all Rotary Clubs are: "all meetings must start and end at scheduled times" and "attendance must be regular, otherwise Membership must terminate". In 1922, President R. L. Stratton was fined (25¢ - ed) for allowing the meeting to run a few minutes overtime. Later in order to permit a discussion which would run overtime, special permission was granted by vote to allow this privilege. In regard to regular attendance our Directors have found it necessary to request poor attenders to improve or resign, on several occasions. Our "Rotominder" Editor coined a new word for such Members – "AMOTT Members" – (Away Most Of The Time).

During the past 10 years our Club has received several bequests, including Mrs. Phemie Miner, Clarence McNeil, Lottie Hulen, Chas. Glock Estate, Mrs. Ben Kelly, Col. W. Grant Thompson and several grants from the W. A. McGeachy Estate. A few months ago, the entire plant and grounds of the Canadian Leaf Tobacco Co. was donated to our Club for our Incorporated Service Fund, which was started in 1956.

I have not been able to cover all the events that have taken place, through lack of time, but I believe I have hit most of the highlights. I feel, after visiting many of the Clubs with our District Governor John Farrell, we have one of the best organized and active Clubs in the District. There are 26 Past Presidents living. Arranged near the head table are 13 of them, as follows:

W. M. Gray

Larry O'Conner

Bill Colby

Doug. Foster

Bob Parry

Ralph Keevil

Bev. Easton

Vern Pritchard

Harold Agnew

Ernie Ansell

Joe Storey

Irving Kopstein

Proctor Dick

The Speaker was introduced by President Frank Gee and thanked by Earl Price.

Printed version of this talk donated by Jack Beardall, a Member of the Chatham Rotary Club for 35 years.



Hotel Sanita