

History of the Rotary Club of Gainesville

It All Began At Miller's Store

If you happened down University Avenue during the summer of 1917, or spring and summer of 1918, you probably would have spotted three or four men gathered in front of Miller's Store. They were discussing a most important project – the formation of the Gainesville Rotary Club.

As they sipped their cokes or lemonade, brewed at Miller's brand new "Gin u wine" soda fountain, Klein Graham, Bill Pepper, Sr., Dr. M. H. Depass, Dr. Gordon Tison, and others, talked and planned for the future.

Finally the "big day" arrived. On August 18, 1918, the small group of 23 received its official charter and became the Gainesville Rotary Club.

The first official meeting place for the Club was at Miss Nora Norton's sundry store, [located next to what is now Vidal's Drug Store on University Avenue].

Soon, however, the meeting place was moved to the now-demolished White House Hotel where a larger crowd could be accommodated.

Kline Graham, even though he helped organize the group, was not allowed to join until about a year later since only 10 per cent of its membership could come from the University.

During the depression years the Club lost quite a few members. Not many, it seemed, could afford the 50¢ luncheon charge. Membership, however, was on the rise again by the end of 1934.

Meetings were again moved -- because of space needs -- to the Hotel Thomas. Later another move was made to the old Gainesville Golf and Country Club and then to [its present location at] the Holiday Inn.

The Clubs early history is filled with bright spots. The visit of Governor Albert Gore caused quite a stir as did the visit by William Jennings Bryan and his wife. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Bryan is said to be the

only woman voted "official-honorary membership" in the Gainesville Rotary Club.

The Gainesville Rotary Club has grown. It has sponsored the formation of other clubs, including the new Rotary Club of Greater Gainesville. It has a history rich with accomplishments and crammed full of memories.

The Club has served as a vehicle for fun, fellowship, leadership and accomplishment. It has helped bring the University and the City of Gainesville closer together. It has afforded an education to more than 1,000 students through establishment of the Florida Education Loan Corp. It has served the community through the building of Smokey Bear Park and other projects. And it all began at Miller's Store.

from the 50th *Anniversary Binder of Gainesville Rotary Club.*