Good Afternoon,

One hundred years ago today. Just think about it. What was life like in those days? Let’s take a trip down memory lane and try to find out just what went in to starting the Rotary Club of Fall River. Close your eyes and come along with us.

The year was 1920. This was the “Roaring Twenties. A period of dramatic social and political change. The year that women attained the right to vote. The year that a guy named Ponzi came up with a sales scheme, the year that the League of Nations was founded.

This was also the year that the Rotary Club of Fitchburg contacted Rotary International and agreed to be the sponsor for a new Rotary Club. The Rotary Club of Fall River. A small group of businessmen met in the YMCA to make plans to form this club. The prime mover was a man named Harry E. Dodge who then was the Secretary of the “Y”. (little did he know that there would be a Beth Fay, A Frank Duffy and a Stephanie Mancini to follow in his footsteps).

The club’s first President was Daniel Sullivan, a physician, who served from 1920-1923. Daniel was a physician and was elected Mayor of Fall River in 1930

The first meeting was held at the Eagle Restaurant on November16, 1920. The club was organized on December 1, 1920 and received its charter on December 13, 1920. The first officer Installation was held at the Women’s Union on Rock Street. How ironic because no women were allowed into Rotary for another 70 years. An earth trembling change that greatly affected Rotary and still does to this day. Our first female member was Paula Raposa and our first female President was Gerry Silva in 1993.Today our club is now 65% female and 55% of our last 16 presidents have been women.

Rotary’s mission of “service above Self” was very evident way back then. The infant club took on the task of helping to solve a malnutrition problem that was pervasive in the Fall River School System. They did this by raising money to help provide fresh milk for the students. They were able to raise the sum of $6000 ($82,000 in today’s money) to assure that every student had access to fresh milk.

Other 1920 projects were Providing Medical Equipment for the Rose Hawthorne Cancer Home, and provided a cabin at Camp Noquochoke, the Boy Scout Camp A special program known as “Boys Week” was a major project which provided a parade and a sports program held in North Park

The first student exchange sent James C. Chace, Gertrude Ostheimer and Robert King to Sorbonne, University of Cambridge and University of Lisbon respectively.

Many other projects occurred in these formative years. The club was able to raise more than $40,000 for various projects throughout the city. This is the equivalent of over $500,000 today.

Evidence of the 1920 club can be found in our lectern which was dedicated to Reuben T. Small, a poultry farmer, who had 30 years of perfect attendance. Our badge case was made by George Dover and Charles Bardbury in 1924. Charles was a carpenter and George did the lettering. Our raffle pot simply appeared at one of the meetings. It was used to collect the fines. To this day, nobody knows who the donor was.

This is our heritage. This history proves that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. That 1920 club is in our DNA and is the impetus for what we do today.