



## Rotary in the 1920s

As RCM entered the 1920s, Rotarians were treated to entertaining and informative programs of all kinds.

- A.W. Edwards spoke of his travels to Canton, China and was asked to extend his talk 20 minutes due to such great interest.
- In 1921, the Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools addressed Rotary on the deplorable condition of the school system.
- Mrs. James Deiter Rippin, Director of Girl Scouts USA, told Rotarians about efforts to sustain the organization through cookie sales. Participating in a forerunner of the cookie program we know today, 7,000 girls baked one million cookies by 1923.
- Count Ilya Tolstoy, son of the writer and philosopher who wrote *War and Peace*, addressed the Club.
- Babe Ruth attended a luncheon in 1922 while spending a week in Milwaukee on an off-season vaudeville barnstorming tour.
- That same year, Brigadier General Billy Mitchell gave an address on "Air Power: Here to Stay." He was joined by the Flying Dutchman A.G. Fokker from Holland who ran the company that built 700 planes for Germany during the Great War.



Harry Houdini  
Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee  
County Historical Society

- In 1923, Harry Houdini, the famous magician and escape artist, performed during a luncheon.
- RCM hosted the entire Marquette University football team, then called the Golden Avalanche, in celebration of their second consecutive undefeated season.
- John Tyrrell, a leading handwriting expert of the 20s, spoke on handwriting analysis in the detection of crime.

- Eugene Lecher, a "conjurer and prestidigitator of great fame" entertained Rotarians with "examples of black art and mysticism of most unusual character."
- In 1924, Rotarians toured the new \$2 million headquarters of the Milwaukee Journal.
- Resista, a 98-pound girl considered too heavy to lift off the ground, addressed a luncheon and Rotarians lined up to lift her – but no one succeeded.
- Sir Henry Lauder, the world's highest paid performer, spoke on the funding needs to assist wounded veterans. A former coal miner, he was knighted in 1919 for his efforts for veterans and is considered the first international superstar of public entertainment through phonographs.
- In 1926 Rotarians learned about the Federal Reserve System from John H. Puelicher, President of Marshall & Ilsley Bank.
- Mayor Daniel Hoan inspired Rotarians with his speech on "Why I Am Proud of Milwaukee."
- It was reported that the Treasurer of Sears Roebuck of Chicago addressed a luncheon on "Life."
- In 1927, a special luncheon was held to learn more about the national movement to construct parkways in urban areas.
- The first films from *The Great War* by Eastman Kodak were shown at a luncheon, having been publicly released only 60 days earlier.
- Former Wisconsin Senator Irvine Lenroot addressed a luncheon about "Failures to Pass Legislation in a Sharply Divided Congress." He had previously been nominated by President Harding to run for Vice President, but the Republican Convention instead chose Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge.
- In 1929, Sergeant Alvin C. York, whom General Pershing called the greatest soldier of the War after he almost singlehandedly killed 32 and captured 133 German soldiers, addressed Rotary on the meaning of Service Above Self.
- 1929 concluded with a talk by Sir Herbert Broom Ames, former financial secretary of the League of Nations, on "Ten Years with the League of Nations."

Early in this period, the Rotary Club of Milwaukee voted to limit membership to 299, and by 1929 had a waiting list. The Milwaukee Athletic Club offered Rotary free office space but increased the cost of luncheons from 80 cents to \$1. Rotary International's logo, the wheel we all know and love, was designed in 1924.



During the presidency of Ted Friedlander (1927-28) Rotarians began the tradition of addressing their leader using a first name, thus the moniker "President Ted."

During this period, the Rotary Fund for the Education of Worthy Boys was extended to include post-secondary education. Rotary members were the core of United Way leadership with the annual goal of \$737,749.37 with an emphasis on assisting people in need through the winter months.



In 1928, the Rotary International Foundation was officially established with a \$5,000 endowment made up with donations from the previous decade. RI Past President Arch C. Klumph, who had proposed the endowment "for the purpose of doing good in the world" in 1917, was appointed as one of five trustees.

Arch C. Klumph

### Milwaukee and the World in the 1920s

New companies in 1924 included Walt Disney, Mercedes Benz and IBM. That year, Wisconsin Senator Robert M. LaFollette received 17% of the popular vote for president. He ran on a Progressive platform eventually adopted almost in its entirety as the New Deal. The first radio broadcast in Milwaukee originated from Gimbels Department Store and the first presidential speech on the radio was delivered.

In 1925, the first presidential inauguration was broadcast on radio. The state of Tennessee prohibited the teaching of evolution. By 1926, land on Broadway and Wall Street in New York City was selling for \$7 per square inch. Route #66 was established, and the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg began.



Downtown Milwaukee in 1924

*Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee County Historical Society*

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh completed his flight to Paris and Amelia Earhart crossed the Atlantic a year later. The carving of Mount Rushmore began that year. In 1928, the iron lung respirator was used for the first time.

In 1929, annual factory production in Milwaukee reached \$1 billion and telephones installed in the city numbered 150,000. Mother Theresa began serving the poor population in Calcutta. The Dow Jones Industrial Average peaked at 381, a level not attained again until 1954. Wage earners in Milwaukee numbered 178,000, falling to 66,000 by 1933.

#### Created by Bill Durkin, edited by Mary Bolich

**Bill Durkin**, President of Durkin & Associates, was a member of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee from 2000 through his passing in the spring of 2021. Bill, who was instrumental in the development of MKE Urban Stables, was actively engaged in the Club's Centennial Anniversary celebration in 2013. An avid student of history, Bill created this history of the Club set in the context of key events occurring in the City, the State and the World.

**Mary Bolich**, a Principal with Red Rabbit Creative, joined Rotary in 2019. Mary has an extensive background in creative writing, journalism and editing working for organizations such as Kohler, Kohl's and the U.S. Navy. She is the volunteer coordinator of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee's People of Action profile series.