



Rotary 1939-1947

Rotary surveyed Milwaukeeans in an effort to identify priorities for capital investment. Rotarians concluded that the city needed more playgrounds and parks, a larger museum and public library, a remodeled sports arena and outdoor stadium and better roadways.

Just before World War II began in 1941, Rotarians provided leadership and advocacy for building a stadium capable of attracting a Major League Baseball team. While it took more than 12 years to become a reality, it set the tone for efforts to modify the city landscape following 25 years of stalled development due to Prohibition, the Great Depression and the war effort.



Milwaukee aldermen survey the location for County Stadium

With the emergence of World War II and a recovering economy, the Rotary Club of Milwaukee renewed its philanthropic efforts in the community. In 1942, contributions were directed to new recreational facilities at Mitchell Field for use by troops stationed in Milwaukee. In 1943, Rotary Club of Milwaukee furnished the Officer's Day Room and Lounge at Mitchell Field. That same year, the Club acquired new specimens for the Washington Park Zoo. And it marked the first year of the roast of the out-going club president, a tradition that continued for many years, until its recent transition to a toast.

Rotary-endorsed post-war civic initiatives totaled \$83 million. At the time of these recommendations, unemployment was at a rate of 2% in Milwaukee and industrial output reached \$1.5 billion.

As the war ended, members donated clothing for Europeans through Rotary International. The club also donated \$10 for each member to the Paul Harris Memorial Fund on the occasion of the Rotary founder's death.

Rotarians Will Ross and Mackie Wells volunteered as co-chairs for the campaign to raise funds to build the Milwaukee War Memorial, a space to provide "art, music, drama, public discussion and social assembly." Support of a summer camp for boys shifted to support of the best high school students interning at companies in the interests of future employees.

On a lighter note, in 1946, a special appeal for new pictures was directed to members who had photos in the directory with handle-bar mustaches and/or high ruffled collars with the comment "the atomic bomb has taken the place of cannon balls."

Rotarians enjoyed great program such as:

- The President of Marquette University addressed the Club on the role of education after the war.



Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops orchestras

- Arthur Fiedler of the Boston Pops shrugged off the future of rock and roll music.
- Norman Gill of the Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau (now the Wisconsin Policy Forum) spoke on post-war improvement programs for Milwaukee—annexation, automobiles, and decentralization of the population.

- Rotarian Brooks Stevens shared his vision for post-war design trend. Another speaker made predictions that, following the war, planes would reach 250 mph and carry as many as 100 passengers.

- A former member of the German Reichstag recommended that Germany be given another chance at democracy, that war criminals be punished, and that German youth be re-educated.

- Several luncheon programs in 1944 were dedicated to determining the likely future of Soviet Russia.

- By 1944, 118 Rotarians from the Club were serving as members of the armed forces. A special Rotary luncheon was devoted to problems post-war: predictions revolved around temporary unemployment, followed by a long period of growth.

- In 1947, Senator Joseph McCarthy spoke about his opposition to keeping German prisoners of war in concentration camps and of dismantling German industry. The Rotary announcement described the Senator as dynamic, aggressive, and colorful.

Milwaukee and the World 1939-1947

In 1939, Albert Einstein's letter to President Roosevelt led to the formation of the Manhattan Project, and in the same year, Germany invaded Poland. The automatic transmission was first available in an Oldsmobile, and John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" was published.

In 1940, Milwaukee Public Schools enrolled 81,753 students. The first McDonald's restaurant opened, the first California freeway was constructed, and Winston Churchill became British prime minister as London endured 57 consecutive nights of bombing.

In 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and 81% of households listened to the president's speech declaring war. Within a year, the Badger Army Ammunition Plant, the largest in the country, was constructed near Madison. Anne Frank began her diary, and Milwaukee Mayor Carl Zeidler was killed in action and was succeeded by his brother Frank.

In 1943, Theodore Roosevelt became the first president to travel by airplane while in office. The bombing of Berlin began with Edward R. Murrow describing it as "orchestrated hell." Milwaukee was the only American city free of debt (by 1956, the city carried \$55 million in debt from commitments to new infrastructure).

By 1944, the Normandy Invasion commenced with 155,000 troops landing on the beaches of France. Anne Frank and her family were captured and boarded the last train to Auschwitz.



Cliff Randall (right) with Carl Zeidler (left) shown with Denver Mayor, Ben Stapleton (center) at the 1941 Rotary International Convention

In 1946, drive-up teller windows and Tupperware were introduced. Winston Churchill coined the phrase "The Iron Curtain," and the last mass lynching in the country occurred in Georgia.

By 1947, the first African American news correspondent was allowed in the galleries of congress. Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play Major League Baseball and WTMJ became the first Milwaukee television station, although fewer than 1,000 televisions existed in the city.

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.