

Rotary International Zone 22



Russia

United States

Canada

France

Canadian Rotary International Presidents

Introduction:

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Throughout the first 100 years of Rotary, presidents of Rotary International have come from every corner of the world. Four of the most outstanding have been Canadians, who were elected during the first half of the century, when the vision and objects of the organization were being shaped and expanded. Leslie Pidgeon, the first Canadian president initiated innumerable new service projects. He used his remarkable financial talents to set up a long-term fiscal plan for the organization. Crawford McCullough came to be called Rotary's greatest ambassador. In the 35 years following his presidency, he and his wife travelled effortlessly, visiting Rotary Clubs around the world, preaching brotherhood and arguing that Rotary unity could solve many of the world's problems. Internationalist John Nelson travelled the Rotary world promoting fellowship and friendship among peoples. Arthur Lagueux, the last Canadian president played a prominent role in the general administration of the organization serving on 22 committees between 1943 and 1956.

Brief biographies of these four remarkable Rotarian leaders follow, starting on the next page.

Listing of Canadian Presidents & Their Rotary Clubs:

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| 1. E. Leslie Pidgeon D.D. (1917-18) | Rotary Club of Winnipeg |
| 2. Crawford McCullough (1921-22) | Rotary Club of Fort William |
| 3. John Nelson (1933-34) | Rotary Club of Montreal |
| 4. Arthur Lagueux (1950-51) | Rotary Club of Quebec |

1. E. Leslie Pidgeon D.D. (1917-18)



Dr. E. Leslie Pidgeon (1917-18)

Dr Leslie Pidgeon was the seventh president of Rotary International, and the first international president who was not a citizen of the United States; the first international president from Canada; the first international president to exemplify in his person and actions that Rotary represents the same values on either side of any international boundary.

Born on a farm in Quebec, Dr Pidgeon became a nationally prominent United Church minister. He graduated from Queen's University in Kingston and the Presbyterian Theological College in Montreal. His first ministry was in Markham, Ontario, where he rose to fame throughout the province as an inspiring clergyman. Later, he played a key role in the union of Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches in Canada to form the United Church in Canada.

While serving in a church in Vancouver, he joined the Vancouver Rotary Club. From then on, his three principal interests were education, religion and Rotary.

He was sent to the international convention in San Francisco in 1915 as a delegate from the Vancouver Rotary Club. Rotary International past president Allen D. Albert, in a tribute to Pidgeon at the time of his death, explained how Pidgeon was received at the convention:

He was unknown to most of us. From our first hearing of his English, almost crackling in its explicitness, from our first appreciation that to him Rotary was a spirit in action, we marked him for further and still greater service to Rotary. That year we elected him Third Vice-President. Next year we re-elected him. Next year we made him President.

So, like the Founder Paul Harris, Pidgeon never served as a club president, a district governor or a director before becoming international president.

During his term as president, he encouraged many new service projects, many of which were involved in Rotary's war efforts on the home front. A talented financial administrator, he was instrumental in establishing a long-term fiscal plan for the international organization. He actively supported the expansion of Rotary into Latin America and visited many key cities there.

Shortly after the convention of 1915, Pidgeon moved to Winnipeg and became a member of the Winnipeg Club. In 1919, he organized a National Conference on Education that brought dozens of delegates to Winnipeg from all over Canada. In 1925, he moved to Montreal and was made an honorary member of the Montreal Club. His wife's name was Edith and he had three children. He died on 1 February 1946 in Montreal.

2. Crawford McCullough (1921-22)



Crawford McCullough (1921-22)

Dr Crawford McCullough was born in Gananoque, Ontario, in 1876. He graduated from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and took graduate work in New York, Boston, London, Paris, Freiburg, Vienna, and Berlin, thus becoming a leader in his profession as an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada, a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and a past president of the Thunder Bay Medical Society. He moved to Thunder Bay, Ontario (formerly Fort William) in 1906.

A good citizen, he served as an alderman in the city of Fort William (1926), president of the Chamber of Commerce (1928 & 1929), president and founder of the Fort William Canadian Club (1908), co-founder of the Fort William Flying Club (1929), and in a number of other social and sports organizations.

In 1916, as a founding member of the Fort William-Port Arthur Rotary Club, he began an association that would have a profound effect on the rest of his life, and, one might argue, through him on many parts of the world. In 1917, he served as president of the local club; in 1919-20 as governor of District No. 19 that extended from northwestern Ontario to Alberta; in 1920-21 he was elected first vice-president of Rotary International and the following year, at the international convention in Edinburgh, Scotland, became the second of four Canadians to hold the International presidency. In 1922 he presided with distinction at the Los Angeles Rotary Convention which adopted a revised constitution designed to confirm the integration of all Rotary Clubs under Rotary International.

Pete Snedecor, his predecessor in the presidency averred in a moving tribute that "Crawford was without a peer in his unfailing and inspired leadership in Rotary." Certainly his lifetime of dedication to the organization saw him accepting chairmanships and/or memberships on a multitude of committees or as a special envoy on various missions for the world-wide body. He was instrumental in establishing the Canadian Advisory Committee of Rotary International; he and his colleagues in the Advisory Committee organized and raised the funds to pay for Davidson and Ralston's extension trip to Australia in 1921. Whether laying wreaths on the tombs of the unknown soldier in Paris, London, and Washington, contributing articles for the Rotarian magazine, or travelling widely on club-cementing trips to many parts of the world – Hawaii 1932, the Orient and China, 1936 - Crawford remained active in Rotary as late as 1958.

Crawford McCullough died on 25 March 1963. He was survived by his wife Grace and son John. Another son, Donald, served as a pilot in the RCAF and was killed in 1941. Grace died a month after Crawford, on 21 April 1963.

3. John Nelson (1933-34)



John Nelson (1933-34)

Born in Paisley, Ontario, on 8 March 1873, John Nelson became the third Canadian president of Rotary International in 1933. He followed a career in journalism; from 1898 to 1921 he was on the staff of various newspapers in Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia. He was the editor of the *Victoria Times* and the *Vancouver News-Advertiser*. He eventually bought the *Vancouver Daily World*. He joined the Vancouver Rotary Club and in due course was elected president of the club.

After attending the first Imperial Press Conference in London, England, he associated with journalists from all over the British Empire. A prolific writer of international articles, he authored *The Canadian provinces: Their problems and policies* (Toronto 1924). He is credited with being a co-founder of the news-wire-service that later became known as the Canadian Press. As a consequence of his

international interests, he was named honorary secretary of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs.

In 1925, he was appointed supervisor of public relations in the Sun Life Assurance Company in Montreal. He moved to Montreal and immediately joined the Montreal Rotary Club. His concern for Natives in Quebec resulted in major Rotary support programs and earned him the title “Big Chief Bright Sun” from the Iroquois Confederacy.

Nelson’s first Rotary international appointment was as a member of the Canadian Advisory Committee of Rotary International in 1927-29. In 1929, he became governor of District No 28. In 1931-32, he served as R.I. director and third vice-president, and in 1933 was elected president of Rotary International.

As a president with a broad knowledge and understanding of world affairs, he welcomed the opportunity to visit Rotary Clubs in cities around the world. Like the other Canadian presidents of Rotary International, he promoted fellowship and friendship among peoples of the world. He served on a number of international committees after his presidency, but, regrettably, his service to Rotary ended suddenly with his death on 24 January 1936, while he was in Chicago on a Rotary mission. He was survived by his wife Clara, two sons and two daughters. Clara died in May 1957.

4. Arthur Lagueux (1950-51)



Arthur Lagueux (1950-51)

Arthur Lagueux, the fourth Canadian president of Rotary International was born on 1 June 1901 in the tiny village of Tring Junction in Beauce County, Quebec. After school, he joined his father's pulpwood business and married Christine Larochelle. They had three children: Helene, Pauline, and Simon. In 1925, the couple moved to Quebec City, where Arthur entered the financial world. For 32 years the firm of Lagueux and DesRochers flourished and became one of the leading investment houses in the province of Quebec.

On 1 December 1934 Arthur joined the Rotary Club of Quebec with the classification "investment banking." In 1942-43, he served as district governor of District 193. He became a director of Rotary International in 1947 and president of the international body in 1950-51.

In a tribute to Arthur published in the *Rotarian* in December 1957, PRIP Percy Hodgson claimed that thousands of Rotarians "remember him as a short, stocky, vital, forever cheerful French Canadian investment broker ... who in his year went to visit Clubs in 21 lands from Algeria to Alaska." Moreover, according to Hodgson Arthur was blessed with high-level administrative abilities that enabled him to bring sound solutions, quietly, to some of the difficult administrative problems of his era. Between 1943 and 1956, he served on no fewer than 22 Rotary international committees. He also served as trustee and chair of the Rotary Foundation in 1952-53. As president-elect of Rotary International, he arranged to have the International Assembly held in Quebec City in 1950, the only time it has been held outside the United States.

But Arthur's greatest passion was Rotary extension. Hodgson stated that Arthur "loved Rotary so much he wanted to see it in every community that could possibly sustain a Club." The year he was president of the Rotary Club of Quebec, he added 52 new members to the club – one for each week. As district governor, he added 14 new clubs to the district. During his year as president of Rotary International, he added 290 clubs to the world roster. In August 1954, he was still hammering away at his favourite Rotary subject. He published in the *Rotarian* magazine what Hodgson called an "action-stirring article" titled "Are You in on the Fun?" By the end of the year, thanks in part to Arthur's exhortations, a record 487 new clubs were organized world wide.

Arthur Lagueux died in his home city of Quebec on 17 October 1956, after an illness of about six months. He was 55 years of age.