

The Carlisle Rotary Club History

Well over a century ago, on February 23, 1905, a Chicago lawyer named Paul Harris met with a mining engineer named Gus Loehr, coal dealer Sylvester Schiele, and Hiram Shorey, a merchant tailor, presenting to them his idea: of forming a club where men of varied professional and business backgrounds could meet and develop broad-ranging friendships. (For those now younger than 40, that means they could "network.") That meeting marked the beginning of the first Rotary Club.

The idea caught on. A second club, in San Francisco, took root in 1908. In 1910 representatives of sixteen clubs gathered at the first national convention in Chicago. That same year, Canadians formed the first club outside the United States. During the next decade, the movement grew exponentially, and clubs were planted in both Harrisburg and York. In 1920, then District Governor John Rudisell of York gave William R. McCord of Harrisburg the task of helping organize a club in Carlisle.

After some obvious, but now undocumented, work and planning, on February 21, 1921, seventeen of Carlisle's leading citizens, all of different occupations, met at the Hotel Carlisle and organized our club. Our charter is dated May 1, 1921, and the charter meeting took place on July 7. Walter C. Stephens, a retail druggist, led the meeting and served as our first president. Although the list of charter members included a funeral director, an automobile dealer, a minister and the owner of a shoe store, members now should note that none of the charter members were bankers, lawyers, or active duty or retired military officers. Those deficiencies were partly corrected in November 1921, when the directors created three new classifications for members: banking, law and hardware. Walter Stuart immediately became our first banking member, and John Rhey, the first lawyer admitted into the club, joined in late 1922. Our first active military officer, General Williston B. Palmer, received an honorary membership in 1946. Our first member from the Army War College, John H. Chiles, joined in 1953.

The Rotary slogans, "He profits most who serves best." and "Service before Self," were adopted at the first two national conventions in 1910 and 1911. Despite these ideals, Rotary Clubs, before World War Two, were not organized to serve their communities as groups. The club served as a forum at which members could compare notes and better understand community problems and needs. Thus informed, and perhaps inspired, the individual members went out into the community to serve, undoubtedly drawing on their friends made at Rotary when committees were needed. In fact, our club, in 1922, adopted an official policy that it would not participate as a group in community projects or offer financial support to them if asked. Starting a tradition that continues today, advocates of community projects were often asked to speak at meetings, giving them a chance to appeal to the individual members for financial assistance or volunteer participation. Our early members led many of the most important charitable activities in Carlisle, directing both the Community Chest campaigns and the War Bond drives for decades. These individual efforts caused us to be cited as one of the ten outstanding clubs in our district in 1942.

Because forming friendships is a key component of the Rotary movement, regular attendance at meetings has always been expected. Few, if any members, may be able to match the attendance record of philosophy professor Guy Rohrbaugh, who joined our club in 1932 and maintained a record of perfect attendance until 1965. Still, Rotary's emphasis on attendance, with the ability to make up meetings anywhere in

the world, provides a strong foundation on which every member can build stronger ties with our club and beyond.

The number of classifications of occupation in the bylaws severely limited membership in the club. Thus, our second bank president, Charles Anderson, did not join until 1937, and the length of our membership rolls remained short. Between 1921 and 1959, a total of 226 men joined our club. Before World War Two, rarely did we have more than thirty-five members in any given year. That started to change in the 1950s, when under the leadership of presidents like Mike Masland, John Peters and Dave Lillich, classification restrictions loosened to allow more than one member in each classification, we began admitting ten and fifteen members a year, and active membership grew to ninety-three.

Those members were needed, because the purpose of the club began to evolve, from one of social interaction to one of community participation. The great break with tradition, and the official policy adopted in 1922, came in 1977 when President Kirby Burkholder and his board organized our first summer roast beef dinner. Requiring the participation of scores of club members in both ticket sales and meal preparation, this event has been used by the club ever since to raise thousands of dollars for other worthy Carlisle causes.

During the ensuing decade, our membership again grew with a spurt, to more than one hundred fifty. This growth would not have happened without the inclusion of the many valuable women who are today members of our club. Susan Nichols, Ev Lebo and Karen Hurwitz became the first women to join our ranks, all in 1989. Without them, and the many others who have joined since, like Joan Dickinson and Bonnie Berk, and who have helped us lead and serve, it is obvious that the Carlisle Rotary would have accomplished far less and would not be nearly the organization that it is today.

Our efforts to serve have not been limited to Carlisle. Rotary International has as one of its principal activities the Polio Plus campaign, aimed at eradicating the disease that cripples children around the globe. Beginning with the leadership of Tom Leggett, our club has raised far more than it was asked to. Today, thanks to our weekly "brag sessions," the amount we have raised for that cause still grows. Our members, notably Charlie and Kathleen Stoup, travel the world trying to do good work with the support of our local club and of Rotary International. Charlie deserves special note for providing dental care to the poor people of Africa who would otherwise never have the chance to see a dentist. And the same goes for Kathleen for her leadership in arranging funding for providing clean, safe drinking water for the community.

To further support the causes of Rotary International, more than 125 of our members have become Paul Harris Fellows, making contributions of at least \$1,000 each to the Rotary Foundation. Eight of our members are part of the Paul Harris Society, donating \$1,000 each year to this cause. Four of our members have served the greater organization as district governors: Paul Burkholder in 1949, Urey Alexander in 1977, Paul Burkhart II in 1986 and Alden Cunningham in 2005-2006.

Founding Rotarian Paul Harris said that we live in a changing world, and that "we must be prepared to change with it." So Rotary International and our club changed and evolved during the twentieth century. That evolution will continue as we mold ourselves to serve our local and world communities as the big-hearted, broad-minded, energetic and active Rotarians of tomorrow.