

Foundation of a fellowship

1905

Chicago attorney Paul P. Harris convenes the first Rotary meeting on 23 February in Room 711 of the Unity Building in Chicago. Harris envisions a professional club that brings together men from a variety of vocations. Gustavus Loehr, Hiram Shorey, and Silvester Schiele attend. The meeting sets the groundwork for the world's first service club: the Rotary Club of Chicago.



[Read about the anniversary of the first Rotary club meeting](#)

1907

The Rotary Club of Chicago performs its first act of community service. The club calls a meeting of civic organizations to establish a committee for installing city comfort stations, or public toilets, to improve sanitation.

"In common with my fellow members, I had learned to place emphasis on the giving rather than the getting," Paul Harris later writes in his book *This Rotarian Age*.



1908

The second Rotary club, the Rotary Club of San Francisco, receives its charter on 12 November. Founding members Homer Wood, Chester H. Woolsey, and Roy R. Rogers attend the charter banquet. Club members elect Wood president, and he becomes known as the father of Rotary on the Pacific Coast.

[Read about the 100th anniversary of the Rotary Club of San Francisco](#)



1910

The National Association of Rotary Clubs of America holds its first convention in Chicago at the Congress Hotel, 15-17 August. Sixty registrants attend. Rotarians elect founder Paul Harris president of the association. Rotary comprises 15 clubs with over 1,000 members throughout the United States.



[View a slideshow of images from 100 years of Rotary conventions](#)

1911

Rotary launches *The National Rotarian* (later *The Rotarian*) with Chesley Perry as editor. The first issue appears in January. The 12-page periodical includes an essay written by Paul Harris about the purpose of Rotary clubs, announcements of newly chartered clubs, and other club news items.

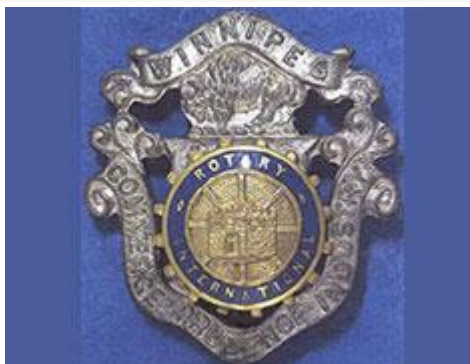
[View a slideshow of past covers of *The Rotarian*](#)



Rotary goes international

1912

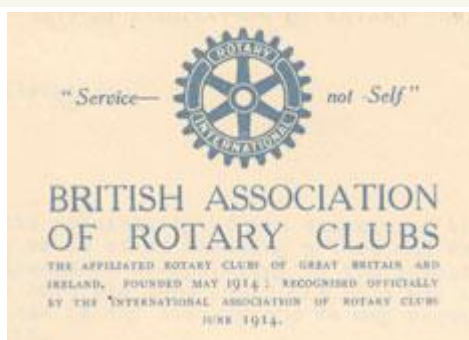
The first official Rotary club outside the United States is chartered. The Rotary Club of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, receives its charter on 13 April, two years after its first meeting. The Rotary Club of London is the first European club to be chartered. Rotary changes its name to the International Association of Rotary Clubs to reflect its new membership.



Courtesy of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg.

1914

Rotary clubs in Great Britain and Ireland form the British Association of Rotary Clubs. R.W. Pentland is their first president. At the international convention, Rotary recognizes the British association of 1,128 members as a



legitimate extension.

[Read about Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland](#)

1916

The Rotary Club of Havana, Cuba, is the first Rotary club in a non-English-speaking country. The club is established on 29 April with 22 members. The club participates in city planning and, in 1917, helps establish traffic laws.



[Read about Rotary in Cuba](#)

1917

RI President Arch C. Klumph proposes an endowment fund "for the purpose of doing good in the world." The fund receives its first contribution, \$26.50 from the Rotary Club of Kansas City, Missouri, USA. The fund is the precursor to The Rotary Foundation, a not-for-profit philanthropic corporation that supports Rotary International.

[Read about the history of The Rotary Foundation](#)

1918

U.S. Rotarian Ancil Brown creates the Allied Rotary Club of France in Paris. The club's first meeting is on 23 August at the Hotel Continental. As the club's first president, Brown invites U.S. Rotarians who are in Paris for the war effort to attend.

Allied Rotary Club in France

Twenty-third weekly luncheon Thursday Hotel Continental.

Give us your ideas and the procedure for organizing a club in Paris.

What will be the standing of the Allied Rotary Club in France with the International Association? The fellows don't think we can have any initiation fee or charge dues. Our lunch costs 15 francs (\$2.70). Food and tobacco cost the diamonds in this country.

I will keep you informed as to the progress of our work over here.

The item in the Paris edition of the New York Herald of Wednesday Aug. 28th, 1918, follows:

ROTARIANS IN PARIS CAN MEET AT WEEKLY LUNCHEON

Hull at Hotel Continental Set Apart as Home on Thursdays for Their Headquarters

Rotarians in the service of the United States Army and Navy, in the Red Cross, the Y. M. C. A., the Knights of Columbus and all auxiliary military bodies, resident in or passing through Paris, will hereafter have an opportunity to get together at luncheon, once a week, to talk over things of mutual interest.

Every Thursday, members of the Rotary Clubs will be expected to rendezvous at the Hotel Continental at 12:15 o'clock for grand departure.

ANCIL T. BROWN IN RED CROSS UNIFORM

Ancil T. Brown, secretary of the Rotary Club of Indianapolis, Ind., who is in France as auditor for the Y. M. C. A., serves as follows in the International Secretary regarding the successful organization of the "Allied Rotary Club in France," of which he is the president.

The Rotary Club of Montevideo, Montevideo, Uruguay, becomes the first Rotary club south of the equator.

1919

The first International Assembly is held in March in Chicago. On 1 June, the Rotary Club of Manila, Philippines, becomes the first Asian club admitted to Rotary. On 17 July, the

Rotary Club of Shanghai becomes China's first club.

[Read about Rotary in China](#)

1921

The 1,000th Rotary club is chartered in January in York, England. The Rotary clubs of Melbourne, Victoria, and Sydney, New South Wales, are the first Australian clubs admitted to Rotary. The Rotary Club of Johannesburg, South Africa, is the first Rotary club in Africa.

1922

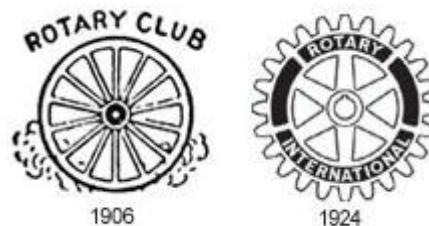
Rotary International becomes the official name of Rotary. The name is approved as part of the new constitution and bylaws adopted at the international convention.



[Read about the history of Rotary International](#)

1924

The Board of Directors votes to adopt the modern Rotary emblem, a new version of the gearwheel first adopted in 1918. The redesigned logo has a more realistic gearwheel with a keyway.



1928

Canadian Rotarian James W. Davidson embarks on a mission to organize clubs in Asia and the Middle East. During the three-year odyssey. Davidson charts 23 clubs in 12 countries, as far west as Turkey and as far east as Thailand.



[View a photo gallery of Davidson's journey](#)

1929

The Rotary Foundation gives its first gift of US\$500 to the National Society for Crippled Children, later Easter Seals, founded in 1921 by Rotarian Edgar F. Allen, of the Rotary Club of Elyria, Ohio, USA. Paul Harris served as chair of the

organization.

[Read about Edgar F. Allen and Easter Seals](#)

A time of transition

1930

Rotary celebrates its 25th anniversary with the Silver Jubilee Convention in Chicago, 23-27 June. All but three of the past RI presidents attend. Rotarians take trips to the University of Chicago, sail on Lake Michigan, and golf at more than 30 golf clubs. Rotarians' wives enjoy tea at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. All attend the Venetian Carnival, held off Navy Pier.



1940

World War II tests Rotary's hope for peace. Rotarians establish the Rotary Relief Fund to help war victims. They also draft a resolution calling for "respect for human rights," setting the stage for Rotary's prominent role in promoting world peace.



1943

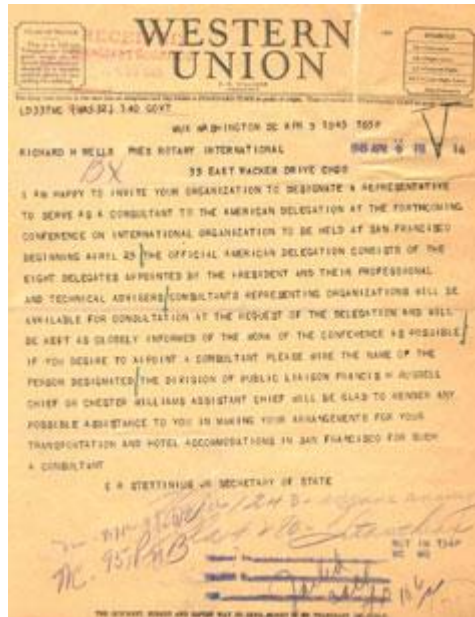
Rotary International officially adopts The Four-Way Test, one of the world's most widely printed and quoted statements of business ethics. Herbert J. Taylor, a member of the Rotary Club of Chicago who would later become the 1954-55 RI president, drafts the 24-word test in 1932 to help an aluminum company on the verge of bankruptcy after the Great Depression.



1945

A group of 49 Rotarians help draft the United Nations Charter. Rotary International is granted adviser status at the UN Charter Conference. Rotarians provide translation and dispute-resolution services to attendees. Rotary's early involvement with the UN sets the stage for future partnerships with UN agencies.

[Read about Rotary and the UN](#)



1947

Rotary founder Paul Harris dies on 27 January. More than 300,000 Rotarians mourn. An outpouring of contributions to The Rotary Foundation creates the Paul Harris Memorial Fund, which awards Fellowships for Advance Study to 18 fellows to study abroad during the 1947-48 Rotary year, forming the precursor to the Ambassadorial Scholarships program.

[Read about Ambassadorial Scholarships](#)



1950

Rotary formally approves two official mottoes at the RI Convention in Detroit, Michigan, USA. Service Above Self and He Profits Most Who Serves Best are slightly modified versions of slogans created by early Rotarians.

[Read about the history of Rotary mottoes](#)



1955

Rotary celebrates its golden anniversary with 8,500 clubs in 89 countries. The RI Convention is held in Chicago. U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon is a guest speaker. Rotary International produces the *Rotary Golden Theater Radio Show* in honor of the anniversary.



[Listen to episodes from the Rotary Golden Theater Radio Show](#)

1957

The Rotary Foundation creates [Paul Harris Fellow Recognition](#) and other awards for donors to Foundation programs. The awards are announced in the May 1957 issue of *The Rotarian*.



Global service and the youth invasion

1962

The World Community Service program is adopted by the RI Board of Directors. The Board also approves Interact, a youth program for service and international fellowship. The program's name combines inter, for "international," and act for "action." It targets young men of secondary-school age. The first Interact club is formed in Melbourne, Florida, USA.



[Read about Interact](#)

1965

The Rotary Foundation creates Group Study Exchange, a cultural and vocational exchange program for young businesspeople and professionals. The first 34 teams, from Australia, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States, go abroad. The Foundation also initiates the Matching Grants program to support international service projects, ushering in a new era of global service.



[Read about Group Study Exchange](#)

1968

The RI Board approves Rotaract ("Rotary in Action"), a program for young adults older than Interact age to participate in service and fellowship. On 13 March, the Rotaract Club of University of North Carolina-Charlotte, USA, receives the first charter. The 21-member club plants a tree on the university's campus to commemorate the event.



[Read more about the history of Rotaract](#)

1970

The Council on Legislation, created in 1934, becomes the official law-making body of Rotary. Clubs gain a voice in Rotary governance by submitting legislation to the Council. Each district sends a representative to the Council to review and vote on proposed legislation.



Council actions spur some of

Rotary's most important work, such as the creation of PolioPlus in 1986 and the admission of women in 1989.

[Read about the Council on Legislation](#)

1971

The RI Board of Directors approves the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) program at the RI Convention in Sydney, Australia. The program is based on an Australian district project established in 1960, which trains youth ages 14-30 in character, leadership, personal development, and good citizenship.



[Read about the history of RYLA](#)

1972

Rotary Youth Exchange becomes an official RI program after more than 40 years of club-organized international youth exchanges. European Rotary clubs began facilitating youth exchanges in the 1920s to encourage the sharing of culture and ideas between Rotarians and young people. The practice was briefly suspended during World War II, but it resumed in 1946.

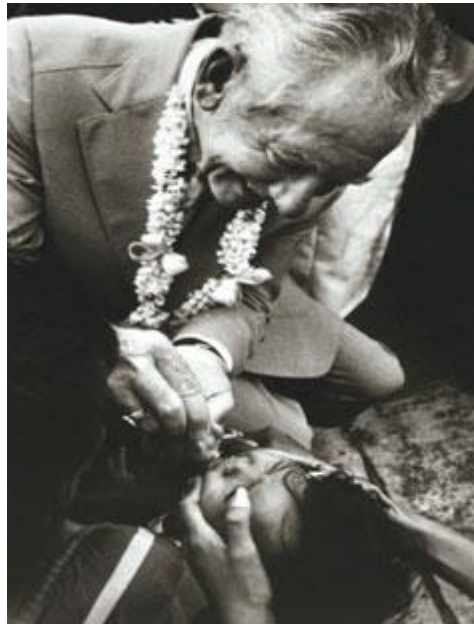


[Read about Rotary Youth Exchange](#)

A new mission

1979

The Rotary Foundation funds the first Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Grant: a project to immunize six million Philippine children against polio. RI President James L. Bomar signs an agreement with the Philippine government to begin immunization and administers the first drops of vaccine to a Philippine child. The grant sets the stage for Rotary's decades-long commitment to the eradication of polio.

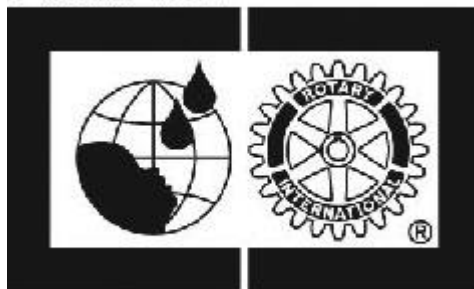


[Read about 3-H grants](#)

1985

Rotary launches PolioPlus to fund the operational, social mobilization, and training efforts required to eradicate polio. It is unveiled at the annual RI Convention, where Dr. Albert Sabin, who discovered the oral polio vaccine, urges Rotarians to maintain their commitment to immunization around the world. Sabin warns that without action, there could be an additional eight million cases of residual paralytic polio worldwide by 2005.

PolioPlus



Rotary International

[Read about the history of PolioPlus](#)

1987

Women join Rotary. On 4 May, the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) rules that Rotary International may not exclude women from membership based on gender. Hundreds of women across the United States are admitted to Rotary. The club that started the legal battle, the Rotary Club of Duarte, California, is reinstated after its termination in 1978 for admitting women.



In 1989, the Council on Legislation votes to eliminate the requirement that club membership be limited to males, permitting clubs worldwide to admit women.

1988

Rotarians raise US\$247 million through a PolioPlus fundraising campaign. Their generosity inspires the World Health Assembly, convened annually by the [World Health Organization](#), to adopt a resolution to eradicate polio by 2000. The resolution paves the way for the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#), the largest internationally coordinated public health program to date. Rotary International is among the first to commit funds to the initiative.



[Watch a video about Rotary's commitment to polio](#)

1989

Rotary returns to Hungary and Poland. The Rotary Club of Budapest, originally admitted to Rotary in 1925 and terminated in 1942, is readmitted on 25 January. The Rotary Club of Warszawa, originally admitted in 1931 and

terminated in 1940, is readmitted on 30 June.

Many European Rotary clubs disbanded during World War II because of wartime restrictions on travel and communication. Once clubs could no longer fulfill Rotary's meeting and communication requirements, Rotary International was forced to terminate them.

1995

The first women begin their terms of service as district governors. The eight women are Mimi Altman, District 6440 (Illinois, USA); Gilda Chirafisi, District 7230 (Bermuda; New York, USA); Janet W. Holland, District 5790 (Texas, USA); Reba F. Lovrien, District 5520 (New Mexico; Texas, USA); Virginia B. Nordby, District 6380 (Ontario, Canada; Michigan, USA); Donna J. Rapp, District 6310 (Michigan, USA); Anne Robertson, District 6710 (Kentucky, USA); and Olive P. Scott, District 7190 (New York, USA).



The next century of service

1999

Rotary establishes the Rotary Centers for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution to help prepare future leaders and diplomats. The program offers coursework in international relations, public administration, sustainable development, peace studies, and conflict resolution at several partner universities throughout the world.



[Read about the Rotary Centers](#)

2002

Europe is declared polio-free at the RI Convention in Barcelona, Spain. By the end of the year, only seven countries remain polio-endemic. Rotary announces a new US\$80 million campaign to support polio eradication. Rotarians respond by raising over \$129 million.

2003

The Rotary Club of Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan is chartered. Jonathan Majiyagbe, of Kano, Nigeria, becomes Rotary International's first president from Africa.



Five Rotary Centennial bells begin their journey to Rotary clubs around the globe in honor of the organization's 100th anniversary in 2005. The bells embark in June from the RI Convention in Brisbane, Australia.

2004

RI hosts its largest convention to date in Osaka, Japan. A record 45,381 paid registrants from 113 countries and geographical areas attend, surpassing the attendance record set by the Tokyo convention in 1978.



The inaugural class of 66 Rotary World Peace Fellows graduates.

[View Rotary Centers students, past and present](#)

2005

Rotary celebrates its 100th anniversary at the centennial convention in Chicago. Clubs commemorate the centennial by launching hundreds of community service projects and contributing thousands of volunteer hours.



2006

Only four countries remain polio-endemic: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Polio cases worldwide have dropped by 99 percent since 1985.



2007

The Rotary Foundation celebrates the [millionth](#) Paul Harris Fellow by recognizing 34 individuals – one from each Rotary zone. The donors receive plaques and certificates honoring their contributions.

2008

Rotary [officially launches its effort](#) to match a US\$100 million challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help eradicate polio.

In 2009, Rotary receives another grant of \$255 million from the Gates Foundation and launches Rotary's US\$200 Million Challenge to match a portion of the grants and further support efforts to End Polio Now.



[Watch a video of Bill Gates speaking to Rotary leaders](#)

2009

Rotary celebrates the 100th RI Convention in Birmingham, England. The event welcomes guest speakers Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, actress and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Mia Farrow, and renowned primatologist and humanitarian Dr. Jane Goodall.

