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The international expansion of the Rotary Organization

Some notes prepared by Leif B AXELSSON

When closing the inaugural 1910 Chicago convention with the National foundation Paul Harris told "*I have thought this Rotary idea so great it might be permitted to extend beyond the confines of this country.*" He had, without the authority of the board already discussed clubs in London, Paris, Glasgow, Melbourne and Sydney.

A Boston Rotarian made frequent trips to London and arranged for a dinner with his business associates in London. The result was the formation of a Rotary club in London, the 4th of August 1911. However they were beaten by Stuart Morrow, an Irish Rotarian from S.F. – the *Runaway Irishman*, who had returned to Ireland and on the 21st of March 1911, had formed RC of Dublin. However he forgot to inform HQ. He was entrepreneurial, dynamic and enthusiastic and managed directly to form clubs in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool and London. He was appointed to continue this developing work in Australia and New Zealand but as he charged the inauguration fees privately he was left in the cold.

A magazine was started the same year; *The National Rotarian*" but the name was changed the following year to today's name *The Rotarian*. Now the devices "*Service above self*" and "*He profits most who serves best*".

In 1912 clubs were ready to be started at the continent, in Germany, Switzerland and France, however the First World War came in between and no new clubs were opened until after the war.

In 1916 a 16 man committee approached Latin America and the first Latin American club as well as the first non-English speaking club was founded as –Rotary Club of Havana, Cuba. This club was later closed along with other clubs started there. Montevideo started the first South American Club later in the year. In Europe; Madrid was founded in 1920. The interest in the cigar joined this effort between Latin America and Spain. Rotary was later banned by Franco and closed down during his time in office. Madrid was however not the very first RC in continental Europe. American military officers – American Rotarians - had started to meet in Rotary manners in 1918 in Paris at the Allied Rotary Club in France. Rotary was now 500 Clubs with 45 000 members.

In Asia Manila RC was formed and Shanghai RC 1919, Tokyo RC 1920. In South Africa, Johannesburg RC followed 1921 and the same year the real RC of Paris was founded and so a development to Oslo, Copenhagen, Amsterdam Oestend, Milan, Zurich and Prague. It was then historic when the first club outside of the allied and neutral states followed in Italy 1925 and so Vienna. Sweden and Helsinki in 1926. The first German club, Hamburg RC in 1927. Earlier to that, in 1921, four clubs in New Zealand and Australia was formed. Rotary was now planted on all six continents – all in about 15 years! By the end of the 20th Rotary had clubs in 50 countries.



Then the Rotary legend James Davidson, from Canada, formed during a successful Rotary sponsored trip and formed 23 new clubs in the countries between Asia and Europe. Clubs formed from different races, religions, casts and culture mixes. Kipling wrote *East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet* However Rotary proved through the work of James that *there is neither East nor West, nor border, nor breed nor birth, when two strong men stand face to face, though the came from the ends of the earth.*

When the Second World War halted further expansion we had 200 000 members in 500 clubs in 77 countries.