

Dublin Rotary Club History

1938—2000

as told by: Alan Thomas

Paul Hyde Bonner, in his book The Art of Llewellen Jones, gives us a phrase that is apropos for this evening. He says, “the past, like good wine, should be taken down from the shelf of life, from time to time, to sip the nectar of the past bouquets.” Our Dublin Rotary History is one of those bouquets.

December of 1938 found the world situation in crisis. The storm clouds of war were gathering as Hitler had just annexed Czechoslovakia (10 million Germans) and was making preparations for the invasion of Poland.

E. D. Rivers was Governor of Georgia and had just met with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia.

Meanwhile in Dublin, Georgia, Paul Kellam – with his lovely locks of golden hair – had fully recuperated from his Thanksgiving Season turkey feast at Webb’s Kindergarten. Parker’s Guernsey farm (telephone number 381) was advertising golden Guernsey milk. P. M. Watson was advertising for pecans, hides, furs, scrap iron and metals. On Tuesday, December 7, 1938, Boy’s Town, starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney, was showing at the Ritz Theatre. On December 8, 1938, Garden of the Moon, starring Pat O’Brien and Margaret Lindsey, was the feature attraction. That same day, the local D.A.R. chapter met at the Woman’s Club over on North Avenue. At that time, Rotary International was in its 33rd year, having been founded in 1905 in Chicago by Paul Harris, Attorney. Rotary was started to allow business acquaintances to become friends, and they rotated the place of their meetings, thus Rotary.

A young man, a veritable dynamo, checked into the Fred Roberts Hotel across from the library. His mission for being in town was to organize a Rotary Club in Dublin.

Porter Carswell was District Governor of District 165, which at the time covered the entire state. He felt Dublin was a progressive town that needed a Rotary Club. He arrived in town to personally recruit the fifteen members needed for a new chapter. He was accompanied by L. A. (Scoop) Whitlock. Within a couple of days they had recruited E. G. Simons, Real Estate classification; Walter A. Hobbs, Banker; L. A. (Scoop) Whitlock, Building Supply; John Bennett Bedingfield, Cadwell Fertilizer Works Manager; W. W. Brinson, Cotton Broker; A. T. Coleman, Medical Doctor; Rubert Hogan, Banker - Merchant; W. H. Lovett, Businessman; Elbert Mullis, County School Superintendent; W. D. Parkerson, Businessman; Joel Felton Pierce, Groceryman; William (Bill) Shuman, Merchant; Harry Taylor (Timber); and James E. Allen, Georgia Plywood Corporation.

E. G. Simons (Pearl Graves' father) was elected as the first Club President.

The Club's charter was presented on the night of January 19, 1939. The Club was sponsored by the Macon Rotary Club. Past District Governor Harry Garrett of Augusta made the keynote address that evening, and District Governor Porter Carswell delivered Charter #4901 to President Simons. The local press described the banquet, held at the Woman's Club, as a "brilliant event for the community".

The young Club began as an evening club and met at the New Dublin Hotel for several years. It's my understanding that a post-meeting game of poker was enjoyed by many of its members. A highlight of that first year for the Club was hosting the District Assembly.

World War II brought hardship to Dublin and Laurens County, and gasoline rationing (5 gallons per week) cost the Club the fellowship of Charter Rotarians Lewis Smith and W. D. Parkerson, as they didn't have sufficient gasoline for the weekly round-trip from Cadwell to Dublin and back.

Obviously, we are extremely proud of the Dublin Rotary Club and its service to the community, local, state, national and international. While time has seen the

passing of all but one of the charter members, and has certainly dimmed the memory of many of us, it is obvious that the early leadership of men like E. G. Simons, M. H. Blackshear, John Couric, Joseph Middleton, Walter Hobbs, Felton Pierce, Russel Daly, Earl Arnau, Marshall Chapman, Larry Battle, Joseph Carr and Jimmy Nelson laid down a firm foundation for leadership and service.

During Jimmy Nelson's administration the meeting site was moved to the Dublin Country Club, with the exception of a brief period during the 1960s when meetings were moved to the Elks Club, and are still held here.

Evening meetings were changed to luncheon meetings during the presidency of Dr. David Quinn, Director of the Veterans Administration Hospital, and his guiding hand launched the Club into the 1950s. It was during the presidency of McGrath Keen, Sr. that the tradition of presenting the outgoing President a diamond Rotary pin was begun. If I wear a pin, it is my Dublin Rotary Club Past President's pin.

One President of the Club during the 1950s, Dan Reed, later became District Governor of Rotary District 6920. Another President of that same decade, Cleon Odom, today holds the distinction of having the longest period of continuous affiliation with the Dublin Rotary Club – nearly 49 years.

The decade of the 1960s was highlighted by the 25th Anniversary of the Club during the presidency of Gene Scarborough.

Sixty years of an organization's history is a long time. For the Dublin Rotary Club, it's approximately 3,000 programs featuring such speakers as Governors of Georgia, U. S. Congressmen, corporate heads, religious leaders such as our special friend Jack Key, educational leaders, and Rotary International Directors.

Dublin Rotary is Ladies Night – now called Spouses Night— since membership has been opened to the gentler sex. We're a better club for it! It's steak nights or other special outings at Ben Hall's or Louie Curry's camphouse. It's shrimp

boils at the beach. It's Hawaiian luaus, it's a journey to Jekyll Island, it's Santa for the children; it's hosting a District golf tournament.

It's a fishing rodeo for the youngsters, it's bicycles for the needy, it's billboards announcing meeting times, it's support for the elderly in nursing homes, it's a handicap platform at the Shamrock Bowl, it's 5,000 books for Liberia, it's a mushroom project in India, it's 700 bicyclists leaving Dublin on a cool March Sunday morning, it's a Joint Civic Luncheon during the St. Patrick's Festival.

It's a Group Study Exchange team from Australia, Russia or Bolivia; it's our own J. A. Durden leading a team to Russia and returning to invest in Kohler Plumbing supplies.

It's 87 International Exchange students in Dublin for a conclave, it's those same students in our homes. It's the joy of watching their excitement as they discover a new world and our own discovery that they are so much like our children. It's the hope of knowing that world peace is enhanced when we reach out to our neighbor. It is 66 Will Watt Fellows and 11 patrons who have donated over \$68,500 to the Georgia Rotary Student Program.

Rotary is just one child who will not have polio.

Rotary is the satisfaction of teamwork. Rotary is proof positive that no man is an island. Rotary is winning the District Bulletin Contest, the Scrapbook Award, the World Community Service Award, the Porter Carswell Award, and yes, it's the pride of watching Presidents Jim Park, Carl Bedingfield, Roger Folsom, McGrath Keen, Jr., Farrell Nichols and Hal Ward accept the District's Club of the Year Award. In fact, over the past fifteen years, the Dublin Rotary Club has either won this award or been runner-up every year.

It's also Preston Johnson, Jacob New, and Billy Adams as District Governor of District 6920; it's Preston as Rotary International Special Representative; it's Roger Folsom, Gerald Smith, Steve Moore, J. A. Durden and others working at the District level of Rotary.

It's the challenge of the seemingly unchallengeable goal as President Mike Cauley tells the Club, "We need to raise \$26,000 to help eradicate polio worldwide," and see the Club respond with 25 new Paul Harris Fellows and 10 new sustaining members. Today our Club has 10 benefactors, 97 Paul Harris Fellows, and 57 sustaining members who have donated over \$111,627 toward polio eradication, other worthy international projects, and world peace and understanding.

It's President Frank Fields saying, "Let's have an auction to raise funds for local scholarships" and seeing this initial effort net over \$8,000. This same event recently raised over \$17,000 for a new Habitat for Humanity home.

It's President Hal Ward challenging the Club on the "Wall of Opportunity" at the Dublin Residence Center and watching the Dublin Rotary Club membership respond with over \$20,000 during the first four weeks of the effort.

It's the dozens of scholarships provided to local students. It's the satisfaction of seeing these young people start across the stage of life with purposeful direction, resolve and a sensitive awareness of local, national and international responsibilities.

It's over 50 Interact students discovering the joys of sharing, of giving – of common goals. It's RYLA students broadening their horizons and assuming the mantle of leadership. It's a Breakfast of Champions – a time for the leaders of tomorrow to be encouraged and challenged.

For all of my life, I have been a joiner. I have been a member of dozens of clubs, organizations, societies and causes. Apart from my church affiliation, in which is centered my quest for spiritual growth, no group has ever stirred the depths of my soul like my involvement in Rotary.

I have asked myself, "Why is this?" Most organizations have an agenda – a cause to which they rally – a cause to champion. Many of these agendas are worthwhile but of limited scope. Many of them focus on the individual member and his or her personal satisfaction.

Rotary also has an agenda but one that is not centered on self or its membership. Rather it is centered on the needs of our fellow man.

Think of all that I've mentioned tonight, just part of the accomplishments of this club over the past sixty years. The vast majority of these involvements focus on three major objective:

1. The alleviation and amelioration of human misery.
2. The nurturing of the youth of this world.
3. Improving world peace and understanding.

These are noble goals. The Rotary Agenda elevates the highest tenets of the human soul, for we should remember "It is not what the world gives to you in praise and in gold, but is what you give back to the world so that other souls may grow."

The Dublin Rotary Club Experience. For some of us, it is only a few weeks old. For some of us, it spans nearly five decades. The past sixty years have involved nearly 600 men and women in the Dublin Rotary Club Experience. Our lives have been entwined in the cause of service to mankind – an agenda that has stood the test of time for sixty years in this community. Today we number 137 members strong and stand confident that the best years of service by the Dublin Rotary Club are not the sixty years of our past but are the years to come.

May it be so!

Thank you,

Allen Thomas

May, 2000

