

The Rotary Club of Vancouver
A Brief History

THE FORMATIVE YEARS
1913 - 1917

It was in the late fall of 1912 that Bela W. Smith, the President of the Minneapolis Rotary Club was holidaying in Vancouver and called on J. B. Giffen the manager of R. G. Dun Company to introduce the idea of Rotary. Giffen immediately demonstrated an interest and contacted four colleagues, W. O. Webster, Geo. Harrison, John D. Kearns, and Daniel Hocking.

Bela Smith alerted the Seattle Club that "Vancouver was ready for Rotary" and L. F. Allen the secretary there, came to Vancouver to discuss Rotary with Giffen and his associates. As a result of this visit the Vancouver Club was organized on the evening of Saturday, March 8, 1913, when a Seattle delegation of eleven Rotarians led by Ernst Skeel gave a banquet at the Elysium Hotel for nineteen Vancouver men. A decision was reached to proceed.

On March 14th, the first solo meeting of the club was held with 32 members present. The first speaker being J. W. Pogue of London, England, who spoke on "Rotarianism". A Roster of members was prepared and soon an application was made to affiliate with the International Association of Rotary Clubs.

The Charter and the official recognition of the Rotary Club of Vancouver, was presented at a luncheon on April 22, 1913. The Roster of the day listed 94 members, a recruiting accomplishment unequalled in our history. There was little doubt that "Vancouver was ready for Rotary".

The "Spirit" of Rotary had taken hold and following the efforts of President Harrison, and J. B. Giffen, the Rotary Club of Victoria was launched on the evening of November 15, 1913.

By August of 1913, the membership had grown to 130 and a delegation attended the annual International Convention held in Buffalo, New York. It was at this convention that J. B. Giffen, was elected a Director of the International Association, the first Canadian to be so honoured.

By June of 1914, the membership had grown to 209 and the club prospered under the guidance of President the Reverend Leslie Pidgeon. It was credited with being the largest club in the British Empire. The activities for the year have been summarized as a time "for philosophy and a close study of the ethics of Rotary". Not surprising for a club that had grown rapidly and embraced an International Movement that was busily attempting to define its basic objectives.

A Christmas Fund for needy children was raised and a Christmas tree was decorated on the property of one of the members.

The Great War, that was later to have a grave impact on the club and to change the fabric of the western world for all time, began just as the Club entered its second year. Before it was concluded four years later 38 members of the club were to serve the Allied cause, two of which were decorated in the field and one R. C. Bechol was killed in action.

The year 1915-16 was a watershed year for the young Club since the rapid growth of the membership to over 209 led to what was described as a "re-action". The President of the day Alex R. McFarlane, a stern administrator, reviewed the membership with respect to classifications. As a result 40 members lost their standing and were dropped from the membership of the Club. It was a smaller and learner Club that faced the challenges of the war and the young community.

Early in 1916 the attention of the club was directed towards the plight of many "tubercular" families in the City. To provide adequate housing for some of these families a number of simple but clean houses were constructed on the southern slope of the City and the Club joined in helping to provide furniture, supplies and food.

The International Convention in 1916 was held in San Francisco and here Past President Reverend Leslie Pidgeon was elected 3rd Vice President of The International Association. Districts were established at this Convention and Vancouver became a member of District 18, comprising clubs from Winnipeg to the coast.



Granville & Georgia – 1900



Vancouver City Hall – 1898-1928