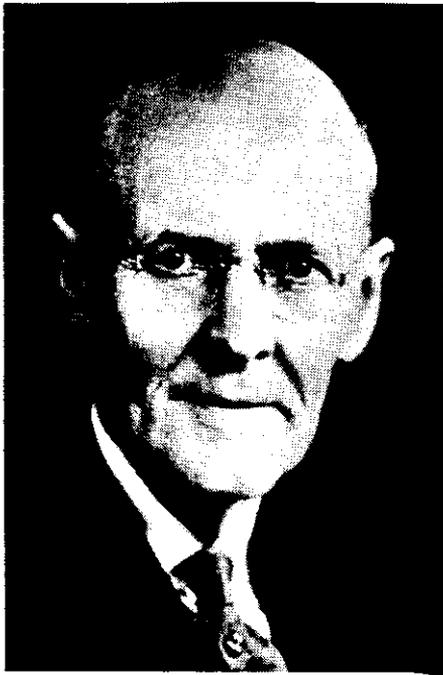
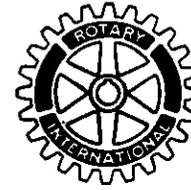


An Interview
with
Paul Harris
Founder of Rotary





INTRODUCTION

On my official visit to the Tuskegee Rotary Club, I learned that Paul Harris, the founder of Rotary, made several trips to Tuskegee during the latter years of his life. On one of these trips an interview concerning his experiences in the founding and growth of Rotary was recorded on two 78 speed records. The sound on those records is now quite distorted, but after many hours of work, a friend was able to get a good tape recording of this interview from which this transcription was made. It is my hope that this will give new insights to Rotarians of the rich heritage which is ours.

William K. (Bill) Weaver, Jr.
Governor, District 688 1979-80

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL HARRIS

This is John W. Inzer, Governor of District 164, speaking to you from Tuskegee, Alabama, on the 20th day of December, 1945. Paul Harris, the beloved founder of Rotary has come to Alabama for the winter months as has been his custom for several years. On February 23, Rotary will celebrate its 41st birthday, and I thought it would be very interesting to have Paul make a recording while he was here which could be used by Rotary Club programs. Leland Childs of WSFA, an affiliate of NBC, a radio commentator of note from Montgomery, Alabama, has come to Tuskegee today to talk to Paul Harris about Rotary. Here is Mr. Childs. . .

LELAND CHILDS: *"Mr. Harris, in traveling about the country for many years, I have noticed that authors, lecturers, and playwrights frequently refer to Rotarians when they wish to identify groups of forward-looking American businessmen. With the 41st anniversary of the founding of Rotary just around the corner, I am happy to be here today and find out for myself about this Rotary organization. It seems to me to have become an integral part of the American way of life."*

PAUL HARRIS: *"Well, Mr. Childs, I am delighted to have this little visit with you. First of all, perhaps I should correct possible misunderstandings. You refer to Rotary as an American institution and it is that. True, it is that the first Rotary Club was organized in the United States in Chicago. But Rotary is an international organization. In the forty-one years since the first Rotary Club was organized, it has spread from country to country, to the sixth continent*

until today there are Rotary Clubs in 66 countries and geographical regions throughout the world. Over a quarter of a million of business and professional leaders meeting together in fellowship once each week in some 5,600 Rotary Clubs."

LELAND CHILDS: "It is certainly amazing, Mr. Harris, that an organization which is so young in years could have encircled the world and fired the imagination of men of so many nationalities, languages, and economic, political, and religious concepts. To help all get a clear picture of Rotary let's begin at the beginning. Tell me just how it was that you came to organize the first Rotary Club?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Well, Mr. Childs, that's a question I have been called on to answer a great many times! Following my studies with Princeton University and at the universities of Vermont and Iowa, I spent the next five years in traveling about the world working as a newspaper reporter, a teacher, and a salesman for a marble and granite concern in various parts of the United States, and I made several trips to Europe. The experiences of these five years enabled me to get a clearer insight of my fellowmen and broadened my vision. In 1896 after my period of wandering was over, I settled down in Chicago to practice law."

LELAND CHILDS: "Was that when you first decided to organize the Rotary Club, Mr. Harris?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Yes, it was. But it actually took me several years to formulate the idea in my own mind. I first conceived the idea which developed into the Rotary movement back in 1900, when after dinner in the Chicago home of a lawyer friend, I took a walk with him through the residential neighborhood. He stopped at

the road stands along the way, and I was impressed by the fact that the proprietors were all friends of my lawyer acquaintance. I had come to Chicago four years prior to that time, but my clients were merely business friends, not social friends. This experience set me to wondering why I couldn't make social friends out of at least some of my business friends, and I resolved to organize the club. Talking the matter over with three of my law clients, Silvester Schiele, a coal merchant, Gustavus Loehr, a mining engineer, and Harry Ruggles, a printer, I decided it then to organize a club about which I had been thinking for four or five years."

LELAND CHILDS: "I've often wondered, Mr. Harris, where did you get the name Rotary for your organization?"

PAUL HARRIS: "This new club was called Rotary because in the early days the members met in rotation in their various places of business so that they might come to know one another better."

LELAND CHILDS: "And when did the idea of weekly luncheon meetings originate?"

PAUL HARRIS: "The idea of the Rotary Club soon met with general approval and the club membership grew rapidly. Almost every member had come to Chicago from a small town and in the Rotary Club they found an opportunity for the intimate acquaintanceship of their boyhood days. Because of the growth of the club, the membership became too large to meet in the places of business, and the members of the club began to meet instead once a week around the luncheon table."

LELAND CHILDS: "Back in 1905, Mr. Harris, did you have any idea that Rotary would ever grow up to be such an organization as it is today?"

PAUL HARRIS: "No, I didn't, Mr. Childs. When I organized the Rotary Club of Chicago, I had no thought whatever that it would develop into a world wide movement. However, my ambitions in this respect were early aroused when the Chicago Rotary Club developed consistently, and the original idea of mutual helpfulness evolved into the idea of general helpfulness which is epitomized in the ideal of service."

LELAND CHILDS: "To get back to the growth of the organization for the moment, Mr. Harris, you were talking just a moment ago about your early ambitions to expand the movement."

PAUL HARRIS: "I soon became convinced that the idea of Rotary, with its appeal to a small group of men in Chicago, could be developed into an important movement. Beginning with the latter part of the first year of existence of the Chicago Rotary Club, that is in 1905, I began to correspond with friends in New York, Boston, Detroit, Minneapolis, and Jacksonville to tell them about the Rotary idea. With these fires still smoldering, in 1908, my roommate, Manuel Munoz, a member of the Chicago Club carried the Rotary message to San Francisco. Munoz talked to Homer Wood, a young attorney, and inspired him to organize the Rotary Club of San Francisco. Rotarians in Chicago were heartened by this success. Particularly so when Homer Wood went on to organize the third Rotary Club in Oakland, California, and then, through friends he organized Rotary Clubs in Seattle and Los Angeles. With the inspiration of this example, I was able to awaken an interest in Rotary in my friends in the eastern part of the United States, and from then on the Rotary organiza-

tion began to expand with rapid strides."

LELAND CHILDS: "When was it that the International Rotary Organization came into being?"

PAUL HARRIS: "By 1910, when there were sixteen Rotary Clubs, it was decided that they should be united into an organization which could expand Rotary to other cities and serve as a clearing house for the exchange of ideas among the Rotary Clubs. Accordingly, representatives from the clubs met in Chicago in August, 1910. Within a short time after the founding of the second Rotary Club in San Francisco, Rotary enthusiasts were well scattered throughout the land and new Rotary Clubs were organized. The seeds were sown, the harvest began. Then in 1910 Rotary entered Canada at Winipeg and became an organization with an international vision and in increased nobility of purpose."

LELAND CHILDS: "After Canada, did you extend the Rotary organization to South America?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Not immediately, Mr. Childs. From Canada we went to Ireland, then England and Scotland. Incidentally, with the entrance of Rotary to other countries the name of the organization was changed in 1912 to the International Association of Rotary Clubs and in 1922 the name was shortened to Rotary International. The first Rotary Club in Latin America was organized in Havana, Cuba, in 1916. The first in Asia in Manila, the Philippines in 1919. The first in Continental Europe in Madrid, Spain, in 1920, and the first Rotary Club in Africa at Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1921. And Rotary has continued to grow each year. Even during the terrible years of war, until today there are Rotary Clubs in Ceylon; in Chile; in Finland; and in the Fiji Islands, in Sweden, and in Switzerland, in 66 different countries and geographical regions."

LELAND CHILDS: "That is certainly an interesting story of the building of an international organization devoted to service, Mr. Harris. Now what about the activities of these different Rotary Clubs all over the world? Are they pretty much the same?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Yes, they are, Mr. Childs. The heart and soul of the first Rotary Club in Chicago was fellowship and that has continued to be one of the basic principles of Rotary Clubs wherever they have been organized. However, in the early years of the Rotary Club of Chicago, it was realized that Rotary could serve a wider purpose than its original aim of promoting understanding and fellowship among business and professional men. It soon became a factor for the promotion of many different types of community betterment activities for constructive work for crippled children and underprivileged children and for the promotion of highest standards of business and professional practices."

LELAND CHILDS: "I think this would be an interesting thing to know, Mr. Harris. Just what was the first community betterment activity undertaken by the Chicago Rotary Club?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Well, Mr. Childs, it was prophetic enough, but it is, ah, very interesting because it was the first of a series of never ending activities which have been promoted by Rotarians everywhere for the improvement of the communities in which they lived. Actually the first community service undertaken of the Chicago Club was the establishment of public comfort stations in the city hall. At that time, back in 1908, this was a decided departure from "current thinking" regarding civic responsibility. But I got the city's mayor, the Association of Commerce, and some of the

leading merchants in the city to meet together with Rotary representatives and through this cooperative activity we were successful in establishing these public comfort stations."

LELAND CHILDS: "As I understand it, my conversations, the principle Rotary activities everywhere then, are the development of fellowship among the club members, and the promotion of community betterment activities and of high standards in businesses and professions."

PAUL HARRIS: "Indeed not, Mr. Childs, it seems to me that one of the outstanding successes of Rotary has been the welding together of representatives of almost every nation in the world, regardless of politics, religion, or creed. You see, as the Rotary ideals of friendship and service to others spread rapidly from country to country, it soon became evident that Rotary could be a potent source for the development of international goodwill. Thus through its worldwide fellowship of business and professional men who are bound together in their devotion to the ideal of service, Rotary has endeavored to encourage and foster progress in the advancement of international goodwill, understanding and peace and not only among its own members, but among all the peoples of the world."

You newspaper and radio people always like to condense a story into a lead paragraph, I know, and so, if you ask me to do that for our Rotary program, I would say that the Rotary program in all of our clubs throughout the world is the "implementing of the Golden Rule," that is, making it applicable to everyday lives of individuals and nations."

LELAND CHILDS: "Mr. Harris, in your 77 years you certainly have lived a full and productive life, and I know that as the founder of Rotary you are venerated by Rotarians throughout the world. What would you say would be the high spot in your thinking about Rotary over the last four decades?"

PAUL HARRIS: "To me one of the most heartening things about Rotary has been its tremendous world-wide growth. My greatest satisfaction in Rotary has been in seeing that by the exercise of tolerance and goodwill, and by the adherence to Rotary's one demanding policy of international amity, and understanding, Rotary has been able to encircle the world with its ideals of friendship and fellowship and service to others. It has been my good fortune to travel rather extensively in Europe and Asia, in North, South, and Central America; in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand; then too at our annual International Rotary Convention, I met Rotarians from practically every country in the world. From these personal contacts, I know that fundamentally man is the same, no matter what his nationality may be. Once the peoples of the world learn how to live together and Rotary is making a dramatic contribution toward that goal, we shall have progressed a long way on the road to universal peace, and as you know, Mr. Childs, to bring our discussion right up to date, there is a decided parallel between Rotary and the United Nations organization. It is my hope that in their deliberation, the United Nations will follow Rotary's cue and approach each other with kindly consideration instead of with fear, distrust, and hatred.

It is true that the way to war is a well-paved highway and that the way to peace is still a wilderness. But, have the United Nations undertaken the impossible? I maintain they have not.

My forty-one years of promoting understanding and good will in the ranks of Rotary give me the courage to insist that the plan of the United Nations is not an idle dream; that it is practical, and that given half a chance, it will succeed."

LELAND CHILDS: "That is indeed a stimulating hope, Mr. Harris. Now we've talked quite a bit about the past, but what about the future?"

PAUL HARRIS: "Well, Mr. Childs, despite the conflicts, and the hunger and hardships facing many countries today, I am an incurable optimist in thinking about this old world of ours, my hope for the future is that Rotarians will continue to be ambassadors of goodwill to all races, to persons of all religious faiths, and to members of all political parties; that Rotarians will continue to be purveyors of tolerance, forbearance, helpfulness, kindness, neighborliness, and friendliness; and that through our world-wide Rotary fellowship we shall ultimately achieve our goal of international understanding, goodwill, and peace."

LELAND CHILDS: "Thank you so much, Mr. Harris, for this informative and extremely interesting story about the founding of Rotary; about some of its history and activities.