

History of the Rotary Club of Fairhope

Information Gathered by H. C. Jordan, M.D.
in cooperation with Rotary Club members

January 1938–July 1939

The Fairhope Rotary Club was established in January of 1938 and was presented its charter at the Battles Wharf Beach Hotel by George V. Klimes, District Governor. Joe Norton, from the Mobile Rotary Club, was Governor's Representative. Doug Harris of the Mobile club was one of the main men responsible for organizing the Fairhope club.

The charter members of the local chapter, #4561, were Rev. Burton L. Hoffman, president, who organized the club; J. W. Eberlein, vice president; George W. Morgan, secretary; Walter T. Dunn, treasurer; James H. Bennett, George Fuller, and Joe Pose, directors; and John T. Bradford, James J. Loftin, Owen R. Minnich, David R. Murphy, Robert Nahrgang, Sr., Lee W. Schnitzer, Ed Tilton, and Raymond Wood.

The new club was honored with a marvelous banquet at the Battles Wharf Beach Hotel. One of the honored guests present was the District Governor, George V. Klimes, who presented the president and secretary with gold emblems, which were to be passed down to the successors of these offices.

A Stork Party was held in June of 1938 for "Ebby" Eberlein and "Tappy" Bradford. Jimmie Eberlein was the first boy and Susie Bradford the first girl born to Rotarians in Fairhope.

July 1939–June 1940

In 1939 a project to promote greater welfare for the youth of our town was put under way by trying to establish the National Youth Administration in connection with the School of Organic Education. The leaders in this project were L. W. Schnitzer, vice president and also chairman of the Community Service Committee, George Fuller, and Ed Sheldon. President for the year was James H. Bennett. A lighted softball field was installed and operated by the club and later was given to the town.

July 1940–June 1941

At this time the transportation situation was getting desperate, and so, backed up by the community, the Rotary Club went to bat for better bus routes, which would include our growing town. Delegates who met with Greyhound Bus officials were Kirby Wharton, James E. Gaston, Robert Nahrgang, Sr., president of the local Chamber of Commerce, Edward Tilton, T. J. Klumpp, L. W. Schnitzer, C. A. Gaston, and Dr. C. G. Godard. President for the year was L. W. Schnitzer, with George Fuller serving as vice president. President Schnitzer was handicapped by illness, and George Fuller served most of the term. Burton L. Hoffman, our first president, died in November of this year.

July 1941–June 1942

The president for 1941–42 was T. J. Klumpp, with J. I. Pitman serving as vice president. During this year we became concerned over the overcrowded school in our community. The congestion was so great that we desperately needed a new building. Besides this, our bus students needed a shelter

from the bad weather while waiting for the buses. Even though our plans were small in the beginning, it has taken years to accomplish part of what we set out to do. Later in the same year the club began plans for a new wharf at the foot of Fairhope Avenue.

July 1942–June 1943

Our Rotary president in 1942 was J. I. Pitman. With the transportation problem getting more and more difficult, a delegation made up of President Pitman; Kirby Wharton, who was president of the Chamber of Commerce; Mayor Howard Ruge; James H. Bennett, who was principal of the public high school; and Past President T. J. Klumpp was able to solve the problem at a hearing with the vice president of Teche Greyhound Bus Company. This meeting was brought about as a result of a visit by Rotarian R. J. Demeree, a Fairhope attorney, to Mr. Hugh White of the Public Service Commission. The club presented Rotary pins to two of its Past Presidents, Lee W. Schnitzer and T. J. Klumpp. These pins were in recognition of the fine work they had rendered the club and the town. The presentations were made by R. J. Demeree. The officers besides President Pitman who so efficiently served the club were Jack Demeree, secretary, and Kenneth Johnson, treasurer; new directors were E. L. Russell and Otto Wadewitz. In July of that year, Mr. Demeree resigned from the office of secretary, which was filled by E. L. Russell from the Board of Directors. W. L. Price was elected to fill the office left vacant by Mr. Russell.

A special September meeting was held at a supper party on the beach, where our guest speaker was Frank E. Spain, Governor of the 164th District of Rotary International. Another interesting social session we had was a Christmas party held at the Colonial Inn. We had a Christmas tree and exchanged gifts, besides other interesting entertainment. This year the club took a very active part in the Third War Bond Loan. During this term, served by our able president, J. I. Pitman, the club sponsored the Boy Scout troop. The club met at the Fairhope Hotel, the Organic School Home, and for a while at the Grand Hotel.

During his tenure of office, President Pitman attended the Rotary International conventions in Toronto, Ontario, in 1942, and St. Louis, Missouri, in 1943. The club's membership increased 47 percent, from 17 to 25 members.

This growing club sponsored the Alabama War Chest, which was oversubscribed. Fairhope Rotarians also sponsored a scrap drive for defense and initiated library membership drives. Both of these undertakings were successful.

July 1943–June 1944

Our president for 1943–44 was Harold McKean and vice president J. E. Gooden. Our secretary was E. L. Russell, who served for several terms. The Fourth War Bond Drive was put under way by a committee composed of L. W. Schnitzer, chairman, Carl L. Bloxham, and Dr. H. C. Jordan. The club took an active part in the Red Cross Drive, with a committee made up of T. J. Klumpp, Carl L. Bloxham, and C. B. Niemeyer, with James E. Gaston acting as chairman. Another project backed by the Rotary club was the ration program, for which we had twelve volunteers who worked without compensation.

July 1944–June 1945

President for the year was J. E. Gooden, with Dr. C. G. Godard serving as vice president. The original founder of the club, Paul Harris, was a welcomed visitor at our club.

Many interesting things happened during the year 1944–45. President Gooden attended all the conferences and conventions for several years. John R. McLure was governor of our district. At that time, the club was meeting at the Colonial Inn. There was not too much traveling done by the Rotary club because of the war, tires and gasoline being rationed.

A great service that our club rendered was to the servicemen who were overseas. We drafted a personal letter to each one of them, and each letter was signed personally by the president.

President Gooden received a great personal experience from the Rotary club in Honolulu. His son, Donald, was in the service, and the last time a letter was received from him, he was in Honolulu. Some time passed before it was found out that he was in a hospital in Honolulu, and President Gooden decided to write to the president of the Rotary club there for some help towards finding his son. Upon receipt of the letter, the president immediately wired Mr. Gooden that he would find his son if he was there. When he found the son, he kept our president informed of his condition as he kept improving. He took charge of Donald and watched over him and took him to ball games; when he was able to walk, he gave him a cane inlaid with pearls.

July 1945–June 1946

The president for the years of 1945–46 was Dr. C. G. Godard. The club sponsored an old clothing drive for war victims and was joined by other organizations such as the PTA, Eastern Star, Masons, Fairhope Yacht Club, the Organic School, and the local churches. Carl Bloxham was the committee chairman for the drive. The district governor, Dr. W. H. Inzer, spoke at one of the meetings. In his speech he defined Rotary as: “Know your neighbor, like your neighbor, help your neighbor, be a good neighbor.” Also during that year the club was honored by being toasted by a Rotary club in England. This was done in the form of a letter from the president of the English Rotary club.

July 1946–June 1947

The Rotary club was honored to have District Governor Lewis Smith at one of the meetings, where he discussed the Club Ideals and then met with the officials to make plans for the future. Another honored guest that we had was Dr. Bruce Nelson of the Baldwin County Board of Health, who gave his listeners a clear picture of cancer as it was in 1946. Our president for this term was Roy Moyers. Other officers were E. G. Rickarby, vice president; Rev. C. B. Wilson, secretary, and Edwin Bluthardt, treasurer; new directors were J. T. Bradford and Rev. Wilson.

A boy who would have always been crippled as the result of a badly cut foot became the big interest of the club. The Rotarians wanted to help this boy, but his parents were not only indifferent about it but were actually reluctant to permit anything to be done for him. However, through the persuasion of our then secretary, Rev. Cullen Wilson, and Past President Jim Bennett, permission was received. The boy, Ernest Lee Taylor, entered Crippled Children’s Clinic and was operated on by one of the leading orthopedic surgeons of Mobile. In due time he recovered and was able to walk with scarcely a limp. Following this he was entered in a trade school, learned a trade (shoe repair), and was found employment. He was our guest at a meeting and expressed his appreciation.

Another thing that seemed important was the stressing of attendance. Of the 39 members at that time, two passed on, Bill Price on July 1 and Otto Wadewitz in August—two fine men who were sorely missed. We admitted six new members for a net total of 43 at the end of the year. Fourteen members did not miss a meeting, and some of them still have not, though three have since died. We had at least one social function, a ladies' night at the Colonial Inn, at which Otto Brown acted as master of ceremonies and acquitted himself admirably. Lewis Smith, the district governor, presented Eagle Scout awards to two of our boys. The present Secretary Book was obtained, and Cullen Wilson began keeping correct records.

July 1947–June 1948

The club being concerned about the recreational facilities in Fairhope, a committee of three was appointed to work with the Chamber of Commerce. These committee-men were Carl Bloxham, Esmond Walthall, and Ben Huxford. The president of the year was Elliott G. Rickarby, Sr., and the secretary Ben Huxford. In 1947, Alabama's educational facilities were ranked 48, and all Rotarians were urged to help pass Amendment No. 1, in order that we might raise our state's educational standards. The editor and publisher of the *Baldwin Times*, Jimmy Faulkner, who was our speaker, advised that if this amendment was not passed, an additional taxation would have to be passed. Other officers serving the club for the year were John T. Bradford, vice president; Cullen B. Wilson, reelected as secretary; Edwin Bluthardt, reelected as treasurer; and directors James E. Gaston, Brad Niemeyer, and Otto Brown.

July 1948–June 1949

President of the club for 1948 was J. T. Bradford, with James E. Gaston serving as vice president. President Bradford was very instrumental in establishing Rotary clubs in Robertsdale, Bay Minette, Atmore, and Foley. This was a very outstanding achievement for our president *and* club. The City Council explained its financial troubles to the Rotary club and asked for its help. The Council was made up mostly of Rotary members, and therefore the Rotary ideals were carried into the City government. This brought about more harmony in the government, which in turn brought our growing town closer together. This could bring to mind an ancient Chinese proverb: "If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character; if there be beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home; if there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation; if there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."

July 1949–June 1950

The president for 1949–50 was J. E. Gaston, Sr., and secretary John Wienand, with C. B. Niemeyer serving the club as vice president. The district governor made his annual official visit to Fairhope and met with the president and secretary to make plans for future activities. Our small club, which started with only 16 members, was rapidly growing. We had now increased in number to 40 members.

July 1950–June 1951

Rotarians attended the District Assembly in Opelika. These members were C. B. Niemeyer, president; Carl L. Bloxham, J. E. Gaston, and John W. Wienand, secretary. The Rotary club sponsored Boy Scout Troop 47, Boy Scouts of America. The district governor for that year was

Dave Mullins, who made his annual visit to Fairhope. Other officers serving for this term were Carl Bloxham, vice president; Fay Bridges, treasurer; and Otto Brown, George Page, and Jeff Bennett, directors.

July 1951–June 1952

At one of our meetings in 1951 we were very honored to have as a guest speaker Senator John Sparkman, who spoke on Communism. The district governor was Frank Davidson, who made his annual visit to Fairhope, along with another honored guest, Jerome Levy of the District Leader Club in Demopolis. Our president was Carl Bloxham, with Otto Brown as vice president.

July 1952–June 1953

One event looked forward to each year was the softball game between the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. Each year the game was not only played to climax the rivalry between the clubs but it was the annual Children's Benefit Game. Officers for the year were Otto Brown, president; E. L. Russell, vice president; Dick Macon, secretary; F. H. Bridges, treasurer; Henry Bishop, sergeant-at-arms; and directors J. E. Gaston, Jr., E. C. Niemeyer, M. O. Berglin, and Carl Bloxham.

As another project, we secured and moved a Scout Hut for the local Boy Scout troop.

July 1953–June 1954

The club, which for some time had sponsored the local Boy Scout troop, began a drive for funds for the rehabilitation of the building that had been donated to the Scouts by the Standard Oil Company. The scoutmaster, Tommy Cotton, and three Eagle Scouts were presented the Scout charter for the new year. Mayor Klumpp set aside Friday, October 30, as Rotary Building Fund Day, which received much from the community. Officers were E. L. Russell, president; Jack Ponder, vice president; Bud Angle, secretary; and Fay Bridges, treasurer.

July 1954–June 1955

The president for 1954–55 was Jack Ponder, with Ed Niemeyer as vice president. Other officers were L. P. Angle, secretary; F. H. Bridges, treasurer; and Floyd Bung, Cecil Pitman, Alton Schermer, and E. L. Russell, directors.

Interesting speakers during this year were Martin Johnson, Social Security head; Dr. Eugene Patterson of the New Orleans Seminary; and Ashton J. Albert, Mobile Rotarian who originated the Mobile Santa Claus Parade.

July 1955–June 1956

Officers for the year 1955–56 were Alton Schermer, president; Cecil Pitman, vice president; Robert Summerlin, secretary; and Ray Malone, treasurer. The Board of Directors was filled out by Elliott Rickarby, Dr. W. F. Gessler, Floyd Bung, and Past President Jack Ponder. The local Rotary club worked in cooperation with the United Fund that year, favoring it instead of the various smaller drives throughout the year.

The year 1955–56 of the Fairhope Rotary Club was one in which it followed the international recommendations of President A. Z. Baker. President Baker's objective for his Rotary year was to

put more Rotary into Rotarians. That, too, was the objective of the Fairhope Rotary Club as was adopted at its first meeting of the Board of Directors. The approach to this, more Rotary for Rotarians, was to have each member who was a chairman of an important committee be an active chairman. This emphasis was placed on all the chairmen, to be an active chairman, and soon the club was on its feet and in a very wonderful position in all phases or avenues of service because of active chairmanships.

1955, the Golden Anniversary Year, was a successful year. It was successful in many ways. Our attendance records were improved remarkably well. Our classifications were cleaned and corrected. As it passes on into history, of the 34 clubs in our district, with more than 1,790 members, Fairhope stood third in attendance.

Programs were excellent throughout the year, and as a public information the Rotary came through consistently with a good program. All new members were well indoctrinated on Rotary information. The Rotary information chairman made it a point that all future Rotarians would be well informed on the aims and objects of Rotary.

In general the affairs of Rotary were well handled, and Rotary had taken its rightful place in the Fairhope community, and more Rotary had been put into Rotarians.

Fairhope Rotary Club for 1955–56 can be summed up generally that it was one of our most successful years, made successful through activity of our various chairman and their objectives and supervised by a Board of Directors that were always alert to the actions of the various committees.

We were saddened that year by the untimely passing of Fay Bridges, our competent treasurer for several years, who at the time of his death was active as our Classifications chairman. Fay will be long remembered by the Fairhope Rotary Club members.

July 1956–June 1957

J. E. Gooden, past president, expired on May 6, 1957; thus Fairhope Rotary lost one of its most untiring workers.

This record is made possible by the work of Mr. William A. Stallard and his journalism class, who copied all newspaper reports from 1938.

Mr. Tappy Bradford was instrumental in obtaining a written report from each of the past presidents.

My thanks go to Miss Lorine Brown and Mrs. Jackie Long for the typing of this paper.

I would like to suggest that in the future this club obtain a steel filing cabinet with a lock on it, and that a record of the meetings and other important papers be filed in this cabinet for future use. In addition, I think that we should designate one individual to write a complete report on each meeting and put it in this file, as a history of this town, in reality, is fairly well covered by the things that occur in these meetings week by week.

In closing, I would like to say that I am deeply grateful to all of you for the assistance and cooperation given me in the compiling of this record. It has been a real pleasure to work it up.

H. C. Jordan
May 10, 1957