

The first meeting of the Richmond Rotary Club was held on Friday, April 18, 1913. There is no one now living who was present on that occasion, and so an account of our Club's beginning must rely on records and the recollections of charter members which, fortunately for us, were preserved in writing long ago. It is quite a story, and one that deserves to be retold for the lively examples it affords of enthusiasm and unselfish devotion to the principles of Rotary, qualities that have characterized Richmond Rotarians from that day to this.

The first seed of Richmond Rotary was planted late in 1912 when William E. Morton, the guaranty bond manager of the Aetna Accident and Liability Company's Richmond Office, on a visit to Philadelphia, happened to meet Glenn C. Meade, the President of Rotary International. Glenn's enthusiasm for Rotary was catching, and Bill Morton came home determined to found a Rotary Club in Richmond. His efforts were not immediately successful, but the seed had not fallen on stony ground-it took a while to germinate, and finally sprouted about six months later.

A second seed was planted early in February, 1913, when George W. Bahlke, the Richmond manager of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, had occasion to go to Washington, D.C., to transact some business with John Dolph, Metropolitan's Washington manager. It happened to be the meeting day of the Washington Rotary Club, of which John Dolph was a member and co-founder. When noontime came, John headed for his Rotary meeting, and took George along as his guest. John did more than merely take George to lunch. He also explained the aims and objectives of Rotary, and told George of the Washington Club's hope that Rotary could be established in Richmond. After the two parted, John Dolph did not let the matter rest. Two days later he wrote to George to reiterate the Washington Club's offer to sponsor a club in Richmond.

George Bahlke's first step was to enlist the aid of Samuel S. Rosendorf, the capable and energetic president of the Southern Stamp & Stationery Company, and together they set about searching for likely prospects. It so happened that, at the same time, Bill Morton, urged on by frequent letters from R.I. President Meade in Philadelphia, was also lining up prospective members. In those days, Richmond's business community was much smaller than it is today, and everyone knew nearly everyone else. It is likely that George Bahlke and Bill Morton, both in the insurance business, knew each other, at least by sight. Bill Morton probably had occasion to purchase rubber stamps and other office supplies from Sam Rosendorf, and doubtless knew who he was. Nevertheless, each group was unaware of the other's Rotary efforts.

On April 4, 1913, Bill Morton wrote to Chesley Perry, the R.I. General Secretary in Chicago, that he was ready to organize a Rotary Club and had scheduled the first meeting for Tuesday, April 10. That meeting never took place. Before Ches Perry could send a reply to Bill Morton, he received a second letter, this time from George Bahlke and Sam Rosendorf, informing him that they were now ready to organize a Rotary Club. It was obvious to Ches that neither group knew about the other, so he immediately wired both to inform them of the situation and suggest that they join forces. It is pleasant to relate, and greatly to the credit of all concerned, that they promptly did so. Once they had gotten together, they were gratified to find that their parallel recruiting efforts had resulted in little or no conflict in classifications.

Things moved fast from then on, and, on Friday evening, April 18, 1913, the Richmond Rotary Club held its first meeting at Murphy's Hotel at Eighth and Broad Streets. The meeting site was probably the main hotel, then brand new, which was connected to an annex across Eighth Street by a bridge. Although Murphy's Hotel went out of business decades ago, both buildings are still standing.

Among the first items of business was the election of officers. There were:

President: John G. Corley, proprietor of the Corley Music Company;

Vice President, George W. Bahlke

Secretary: Samuel S. Rosendorf

George Bahlke would undoubtedly have been the Club's second president, but fate intervened. In February, 1914, his company transferred him to Baltimore, and he resigned from the Richmond Club. He joined the Baltimore Rotary Club, in due time served as its president, and later served as district governor. George remained an honorary member of Richmond Rotary until his death in 1943. The new vice president elected by the Board to fill the unexpired term was Thomas B. McAdams, the vice president of the Merchant's National Bank. Tom, who had worked closely with the founders from the beginning, was elected president in 1914, and served two terms, our only president to do so. Sam Rosendorf served as secretary for three years, and it was he who in July, 1913, founded our club's publication. He named it "Tabasco" because he had lots of "hot stuff" to pass along to the members, a function which it has fulfilled without interruption ever since.

At the first meeting, sixty-nine men applied for membership. By May 17, when the club's charter application was sent to Rotary International, the number had risen to 125, the largest new club to apply for Rotary membership up to that time. Our application was placed before the R.I Board of Directors at their meeting of May 29, 1913, and on the recommendation of President Glenn Meade, they granted our club Charter No. 69. Notification was sent by telegram to Sam Rosendorf on the following Monday, June 2.

The Club seems to have received the news of its charter very calmly. They held no ceremony, not even a modest one. At the regular meeting next day, Tuesday, June 3, Secretary Sam stood up, held up the telegram, and announced, "Well, here it is, boys, our charter. We are in business!" And that was that.

It would be tedious to cite the business of each of the 125 charter members, but a selection of them needs to be mentioned to illustrate the great changes that 75 years have produced in the business community in general, and in Richmond's in particular. William H. Adams was a bookbinder; Wallace G. Capitaine of the Southern Manufacturing Company made Good Luck brand baking powder; Grover C. Dula's Westmoreland Candy Company manufactured Charmian Chocolates (60 cents for a one-pound box) and Peanut Crisp (made in Old Virginia, sold everywhere, price 5 cents); E. Tucker Harrison of the Southern Stove Works manufactured cast iron stoves; Ike J. Marcuse of the American Can Company produced tin cans; and G. Harry Thompkins was the Richmond sales agent for Indian brand motorcycles. Despite all of the changes over the years, six of the firms represented by charter members in 1913

are still represented in Richmond Rotary today. These are the C.J. Billups Funeral Home; the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company, the Merchants National Bank (now the Sovran Bank); Wilson & Pullen accountants (now McGladrey & Pullen); Schwarzschild Brothers Jewelers; and Whittet & Shepperson, printers. Today's Rotary Club also includes classifications such as computer sales, air transportation, radio broadcasting, and electronic device manufacturing that were unknown and probably undreamed of in 1913.

Although the founding of the Rotary Club of Richmond was a momentous event in the lives of the members, it was apparently little noted in the community at large. Of Richmond's four newspapers, not one made any mention of Richmond Rotary, but we gladly forgive them in view of all the nice things they have had to say about us in the years since.

In the early days each Rotary Club designed its own emblem, and this is our first one. It was used until the present standardized emblem was adopted by Rotary International in 1915.

