



Rotarian Charles Webb, top left, worked for years to help crippled children throughout South Carolina. His leadership was a precursor to Rotary International's global fight to eradicate polio.



Webb, pictured at the far right, and the Rotary Club of Charleston led a successful district-wide campaign in the early 1950s to buy a station wagon for the Crippled Children's Society of South Carolina. (Photos provided by Mr. and Mrs. Rutledge Webb.)

# The 1950s: Leading the way

David Abel, contributing editor

## Overview

The Club entered the 1950s operating for the first time officially under the standard constitution, which Rotary International had approved in 1949. In the middle part of the decade about the time the Club celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, District Governor David McLeod of Florence told members the Rotary Club of Charleston was the number one club in South Carolina.

At the beginning of the decade, the Club's newsletter, the *Keyway*, was four pages long and featured small ads from establishments such as Copleston's Klendry, Paul Motor Company, Coca-Cola, Carolina Coffee, Reeves Oil Co., Ideal White Swan Laundry, SC National Bank, Charleston Oil Co., Purity Ice Cream Co., Wecco Printers, First Federal Savings & Loan and Penney's. By the end of the decade, the *Keyway* featured no ads.

## Membership

The Club gained 21 members over the decade and ended it with 144 members. It also hosted the District Conference in 1959.

## Projects and community service

Rotarians helped the Boy Scouts organize seven new Cub Packs and attracted 140 new Cubs through calling on various institutions and securing their support. In the early part of the decade Rotary began sponsorship of the Boy Scout Merit Badge Show, and in 1955 this event netted over \$2,600 for the Scouts.

Club members also donated \$10,000 to a renovation project for Marion Square and led a beautification project at the Pinewood Tuberculosis Hospital. Additionally, the Charleston Club led the way for a district-wide special assessment of members to help pay for a station wagon for the Crippled Children's Society.

The Club again had the honor of having a member serve as district governor when Ralph Meadowcroft was elected to this office for the 1957–58 Rotary year.

## Notable speakers

Among the notable speakers during the 1950s were:

- Admiral Phil Womble, who engineered the “hoax” of the year by signing up members for Navy duty;
- Adair Baissell of the Rotary Club of Charleville, France, who thanked members for what they had done for his club during World War II;
- George W. Williams, who provided a history of the early Santee-Cooper project from the 1790s to the 1840s;
- Rotary International Vice President Halsey Knapp, who spoke to the Club during Ladies' Night.

Other speakers included Congressman Mendel Rivers and Dr. William Prioleau, President of the Medical Society of South Carolina.

## 1950–51: New policies adopted during year

During this year, the Club adopted a number of new policies. It decided to:

- Eliminate references to religious affiliations;
- Have no political speakers;
- Prohibit sale of tickets for any cause (unless for a Club-sponsored event); and
- Keep the club from being used as a sounding board for financial drives.

Additionally, members agreed that all regular meetings would be held in the hotel.

The Club tried to save the chapel on the Sears lot and urged reactivation of the Air Base. Members bought a TV for patients in the Clinton Hospital. The Club accepted loads of topsoil donated by SCE&G for the Marion Square renovation project.

The Club sponsored a uniformed baseball team on playground for boys. Throughout the year, members found themselves subjected to a variety of fines. In a January 1951 meeting, they learned why, according to the *Keyway*: "It seems that the board of directors on a dim, dark night some months ago, decided we should have a baseball team." With tongue in cheek, the author concluded, "There is a remote possibility that should this team go on to win the World Series, we may get our fines returned."

Former State Sen. Shep Nash of Sumter, past president of the S.C. Wildlife Federation, discussed the increasing scarcity of wild birds for hunters and urged the state to take politics out of the S.C. Wildlife Department.

The Club sponsored a Merit Badge show for the Boy Scouts with members Rosebrock and Amme as co-chairmen. All living charter members and past presidents were guests at a special program. A fish fry at Coburg's, attended by Rotarians and wives, had an excellent turnout. An interclub meeting with the St. Andrews club at the Cavallaro restaurant was a big success. At another meeting, there were 50 sons and daughters present to hear the College of Charleston Glee Club. A Ladies' Night was held in February with over 200 in attendance for a cocktail hour, banquet, souvenirs and door prizes. Porter Carswell was the speaker.

Fred Bailey had a large crowd to attend the District Conference in Clemson. Luther Rosebrock and Red McAlister gave gifts to Rotarians on their birthdays, and the Club had a big birthday cake every month.

Thirteen ads appeared in the *Keyway* for the first time with Milby Burton as the advertising chairman. The president started fining members when their picture appeared in news articles.

The year started with a bank balance of \$91.95 with 123 members and ended with \$946.58 with 137 members. A new seating arrangement was started with members assigned to a specific table for a month and then rotated. A project called "Friend X,"

was started with each member having a buddy. President Rucker "Chief" Newbery was presented a framed certificate signed by all members at the end of his term.

Start: 123 members. End: 136 members.

## 1951–52: Reading the fine print

Admiral Phil Womble engineered the "hoax" of the year when Rotarians attended lunch at the old Mine Force Base. Members, thinking they were signing the attendance roster, signed up for service in the U. S. Navy. An intercity forum was held in Charleston with Rotarians from Lake City, Walterboro, Summerton and Summerville participating.

Adaier Baissell of the Rotary Club of Charleville, France, visited with Buddy Thornhill and appeared before the Club to thank the members for what they had done during the war for his Club.

One of England's foremost architects, Anthony Miniprio of London, told members how Charleston might preserve its architectural heritage. He urged city leaders to adopt a regional plan to prevent scattered development.

Billy Coleman was the chairman of a Rotary-sponsored show for the Boy Scouts and the results were outstanding. Rotarians Corbin, Schroeder and Butt were respective presidents of the Boy Scouts, the YMCA and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Club donated \$500 to be used toward the salary of a teacher for crippled children when the proposed clinic became a reality. The Club also donated money for the State Crippled Children's Society. The Club presented a book on the history of Charleston each week to the visiting Rotarian from the most distant club. The board of directors commenced meeting on a Tuesday at noon, instead of during monthly supper meetings. Members brought secondhand clothes to one meeting to be given to the Junior League Thrift Shop.

Sixteen copper lanterns were made by the Murray Trade School for the Marion Square Project. And the power company installed lights on Marion Square without charge.

The board instructed the secretary to record in a file for convenient reference all club policies to assist future board members and enable them to administer the Club efficiently.

The annual dues were raised to \$93, which included luncheons, and a credit of \$1.25 was given for makeups. The dues were payable in advance on a quarterly basis. Joe Young, Buddy Thorne and Chief Newbery were appointed to update the Club's bylaws. The *Keyway* started having a different editor each month. President Art Field assessed fines right and left to build up the Service Fund.

Because of his outstanding service, Field was presented with a beautiful silver service platter.

Start: 136 members. End: 136 members.

## 1952–53: Considered number one club in S.C.

George W. Williams gave a very interesting and pertinent discussion of the first Santee-Cooper project, which started in the 1790s and finished 50 years later. He pointed out the project cost three times as much as the original estimate and took three times as long to build. The undertaking was designed to furnish a navigable channel from Charleston to the interior of the state and it was used for 40 years.

District Governor David McLeod of Florence said the Rotary Club of Charleston was the number one in the state. Jim Culpepper talked on classification principles; Conrad Zimmerman covered fellowship; Billy Coleman explained attendance rules; Tom Tobias told of the *Keyway*; and Bill Piper explained the Rotary Foundation Fellowships.

A book entitled *Charleston Grows* was given each week to the visiting Rotarian from the most distant Rotary Club. This book told of the city's industrial and business development in recent years.

Some 62 Rotarians signed up to give three pints of blood each to the Red Cross for the blood bank.

The board authorized the changing of the format of the *Keyway*. The format, presented as a three-way folder, started in 1953 but didn't last long in spite of pictures. To try to generate interest in

the *Keyway*, the secretary was requested to write a controversial column each week. Members recalled that it worked too well.

President Augustine T. Smythe attended the Rotary International Convention in Mexico City and was enthusiastic over the exceptionally gracious and cordial hospitality of the Mexican Rotarians.

Buddy Thornhill gave a heartwarming talk on the four avenues of service in Rotary.

A Ladies' Night was held in April at the Alhambra Hall that included a chicken dinner and square-dancing. The Club made donations to the Boy Scouts, crippled children and Red Cross, and they furnished uniforms for a boys' baseball team in the city league. The Club was financially sound and ended with a \$679 surplus.

Start: 136 members. End: 137 members.

## 1953–54: Leading way to help disabled children

The Club voted to assess each member 60 cents, if other Rotary Clubs in the state would do likewise, to purchase a new station wagon for the Crippled Children's Society of S. C. The other clubs also did this. The Club also sent \$500 from the Service Fund to the society.

Jack Krawcheck reported that members had contributed \$10,000 to the Marion Square Project and that the City had given \$5,000. The Club then approved a new project to beautify the tuberculosis hospital on Calhoun Street.

Rotarians were called on and rallied effectively to give blood for Rotarians A.W. Allison and Edward J. Thornhill. The Club withdrew its support from the Pony League on the Charleston playgrounds as members felt there was not enough supervision. The Club sponsored a kickoff luncheon for the Community Chest. A Christmas card was printed and sent to all visitors to the Club for the past year.

Rotary International Vice President Halsey Knapp spoke to the Club during Ladies' Night.

## SPOTLIGHT: Rotary members help crippled children

Rotary founder Paul Harris for years wanted to have the international organization do something to help disabled children. In the late 1920s, Charleston Rotarian Charles Webb got interested too. When his son Rutledge became a polio patient in 1935 and Webb saw what could be done to help children, Webb and Club members went into action to found a local Crippled Children's Society. Webb served as executive director until his death in 1962.

At first, the group furnished crutches, braces, wheelchairs, and medical services as the needs arose. The Club made the first contribution toward an orthopedic school when it was only an idea. In 1953, the school was established in the basement of the Trinity Methodist Church. In 1954, the Society moved to 56 Wentworth Street, where it remained until the new center was completed in 1963.

The history of Rotary is closely identified with the life, work and caring for crippled children all over America. In the late 1970s, Rotary started a massive immunization program throughout the world to eliminate the effects of polio, and in 1986, Rotary made a promise to the world to eliminate polio from the face of the earth by 2005, which is the 100th anniversary of Rotary. The Rotary Club of Charleston is and will continue to be a very active participant in reaching this goal.

The members of the Rotary Club of Charleston can be proud of the efforts of Club predecessors in starting the Crippled Children's Society in Charleston. And we can be especially proud and grateful to Charles Webb for his extraordinary work in establishing the center.

In May 1982, the Club recognized Webb's devotion to Rotary by making him a Paul Harris Fellow. His son Rutledge accepted this recognition on behalf of his deceased father.

-- Jerry Nuss



The board passed a motion stating it would be the policy of the Club to loan money only to undergraduate college students who had finished their junior year in college.

During the previous year, the Club had adopted a new set of bylaws that called for the outgoing president to be made the vice president for the following year. The roster was changed to a loose-leaf binder, which included one member to a page, and gave members an opportunity to keep up with the new and dropped members.

The Club had a fine attendance at the Club Assembly held in the renovated YMCA. The book *Quaint Old Charleston* was given weekly to the visiting Rotarian from the most distant Rotary Club.

Start: 137 members. End: 137 members.

## 1954–55: Cabin built for Scouts

This year was the 35th anniversary of the Rotary Club of Charleston and the Golden Anniversary of Rotary International.

On Feb. 22, 1955, the Club held a special program entitled "Looking Backward." Founding member Cham Connelley reviewed the historical highlights of the Club, the most important of which included helping to fund construction of the Francis Marion Hotel, work to help crippled children, the student loan fund and formation of the nation's first Ladies Auxiliary, which later became known as the Rotary-Anns.

Also during the program, George Rogers spoke briefly on the spirit of Rotary. He commented that community service by Rotary often was misunderstood. "He cited the Marion Square project as an ideal undertaking – a 'non-recurring expense, a specified time limit, a job not the responsibility of any other existing organization.'"

Carol H. Jones of Columbia was a special guest. He had been the district governor in 1921 and presented the charter in 1920.

In further celebration of the anniversary, the Rotary clubs of Beaufort, St. Andrews, Summerville and North Charleston, all of which were chartered by the Charleston Club, assembled in Charleston to hear speakers from each club extol its club's accomplishments.

The Club erected a sleeping cabin for the Boy Scouts at its Camp Ho-Non-Wah. Another project was beautifying the grounds at the Pinehaven Tuberculosis Hospital. More than 1,500 yards of topsoil was used and wonderful cooperation was given by various garden clubs and county officials. The meeting of April 12 celebrated the completion of this project.

The merit badge show sponsored by Rotary for the Boy Scouts netted over \$2,600. R.M. Hanckel, active in Scout work and president of the Sertoma Club, addressed Club members on the needs of the Boy Scout Camp. He thanked Rotary and individual Rotarians for their generous contributions to scouting.

The Club raised the fee charged to new members to \$35 with \$10 going to the Rotary Foundation. The board of directors voted to sponsor the Westminster Choir and to underwrite the expense of having the Charleston Symphony Orchestra perform Mozart's *Requiem*. The Citadel offered its facilities to Rotary for this event.

Many noted speakers addressed the Club this year. Among them were Congressman Mendel Rivers; State Senator Rembert Dennis; Dr. John Hawk, Director of the Cancer Clinic; and Dr. William Prioleau, president of the Medical Society of South Carolina.

President Ralph Meadowcroft would later become the district governor in 1957–58.

Start: 137 members. End: 141 members.

## 1955–56: Club sponsors Westminster choir

The Club sponsored the famous Westminster College Choir in a "Musicrama" and the proceeds were to purchase uniforms for the Charleston High School Band. There was a lack of support and attendance and the Club lost money.

Rotary joined other service clubs to hear the views of J.C. Penney, one of America's foremost retailers. He expounded his ideas on friendly competition and stated there was no better friend than a fair competitor following Rotary's Four Way Test.

In taking over the office of president, President Bill Gwynette stated the year would stress committee work and reaffirm the ideals

of Rotary. A club assembly was held July 12 and all committees had been organized.

When District Governor Myron Tupper of Rembert addressed members, he asked them to ponder three questions:

- “What has Rotary done for you personally?”
- “What have you done for Rotary?” and
- “What does Rotary mean to you?”

Ron Reilly, Paul Buckholdt, A.W. Allison and Ed Thornhill told truthful stories of fishing experiences, but members felt they were trying to reorganize the Liars Club.

Charleston had 27,000 telephones in 1949, and by 1955 there were 47,000.

The Ashley Hall Choral Group entertained the Club; Rotarians brought their children to a Club meeting.

The Club passed a resolution directed to ACL Railroad setting forth offers of cooperation and advantages for the railroad to move its headquarters to Charleston.

Rotarians took up a collection to purchase toys for crippled children and manned the kettles for the Salvation Army. Club members were made honorary members of the Navy's Mine Force when they met at the Mining Base located at the foot of Calhoun Street.

Eighteen new members were added to the rolls, but the Club lost 17 for various reasons. Attendance for the year was 89.75 percent with 24 members having 100 percent attendance.

Ladies' Night was one of the best attended in the history of the Club. Some 192 people attended the gala at the Cavallaro with Charles Hall as the master of ceremonies. Club members also took a harbor cruise from Union Pier at the foot of Market Street.

A large group of Rotarians attended the District Conference in Columbia and witnessed Ralph Meadowcroft nominated for district governor in 1957–58. Buddy Thornhill accepted chairmanship for the District Conference to be held in 1957. The Club was now part of District 283.

Start: 141 members. End: 142 members.

## 1956–57: Members focus on service

President James Bagwell offered the four points for continued special attention:

- Revitalization of Rotary's traditional crippled children's work;
- Financial buildup of the Club's Student Loan Fund;
- Well-qualified members to fill open classifications; and
- Improvement of the attendance record with continued good programs and good fellowship.

The *Keyway* editors decided not to carry any agenda of the weekly programs so the historian had to rely on *The News and Courier*.

Rotarians rallied to the call for blood donations for two Rotarians, A.W. Allison and Edward J. Thornhill. One meeting was held at the Navy's Mine Base and the Club had two decorated automobiles in the Azalea parade.

Some 27 Club members went to Parris Island by chartered bus and spent the day with the Marines there. Club members donated \$151 to purchase toys for crippled children.

Linwood Sikes spoke on "A New Look for Unification." Ron Reilly, who held national competitive swimming records, was the volunteer swimming coach for The Citadel and did an outstanding job.

The Club approved a Chamber of Commerce project looking into the merger of Charleston with suburbs. Club members gave \$2,000 to furnish a double cabin at the YMCA camp in honor of Clarence Getty.

The gravel on Marion Square was plowed up and 300 yards of topsoil hauled in. A stag supper at Andre's really produced fellowship even if members had to cook their own steaks and do without drinking water.

Thirty members had 100 percent attendance for the year and broke all records. The Club had a net increase of four members. The Club was cohost for the District Conference.

Start: 142 members. End: 146 members.

## 1957–58: Members help Scouts, YMCA

The Club was honored by having the president of Rotary International visit and speak. Charles G. Tennant of Asheville, N. C., was invited by past District Governor Buddy Thornhill for the occasion. Wives were invited to this meeting.

Ralph Meadowcroft really rang the bell with a stirring address on Rotary when he made his official visit to the Club as the district governor.

Art Field, who contributed so much for Charleston and Rotary, died as did charter member Cham Connelley, who left a legacy to the scholarship loan fund. Members also were stunned by the sudden death of hardworking Howard Ryle.

The Board decided a miniature Rotary flag of the Club would be presented to the visiting Rotarian attending from the most distant point. Members made a generous contribution to assist local Boy Scouts to purchase a new service center, and the new \$2,000 building at the YMCA camp was erected in memory of Clarence Getty.

President Charlie Palmer showed slides of his adventures in attending the International Convention in Lucerne. President-elect Henry Robertson and Secretary Chief Newbery attended the Rotary International Convention in Dallas. Fourteen members attended the District Conference in Myrtle Beach, where Austin Smythe was one of the main speakers.

The Youth Committee had four young people speak for youth, and they told of the activities of the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts. Rotarians brought their children (90 in number) to the Club on December 10 where there was a Santa Claus and gifts. Rotarians manned the Salvation Army kettles for one day and took up a collection to purchase toys for the Crippled Children's Center.

The Club was now part of District 777, which had clubs in the eastern part of South Carolina.

Start: 146 members. End: 149 members.

## 1958–59: District's best club and bulletin

During this year, the Club was awarded a certificate at the District Conference as the best Club in the district. The *Keyway* was voted the best bulletin.

The Club sent \$300 to the Rotary International's Fellowship program. Charles Hall was in charge of a program for Children's Day on December 23. There were 116 guests and all brought a toy for donation to the Salvation Army. The Club voted to sponsor a Cub Scout Pack for the Crippled Children's Center.

Two Club assemblies were held in the form of Dutch treat suppers, and over 30 members attended each meeting. Urban renewal was a hot subject and a special program was presented.

Members held a joint meeting with other civic organizations on Armed Forces Day. The Ashley Hall Red Choir performed at a meeting in December with the wives of members as guests. In spite of many changes in the meeting place to various locations, 24 members received 100 percent attendance pins.

Fred Bailey presented the Club with a new bulletin board and Ron Reilly donated photos of each Rotarian. Each Rotarian was furnished with a list of filled and unfilled classifications, and 15 new members were brought in. Unfortunately, the Club lost 10 members, including past President Clarence Legerton and Charles Prentiss due to death.

At the end of this Rotary year, Charlie Palmer, on behalf of the members, presented a silver tray to outgoing President Henry Robertson. Palmer noted, "Henry has exemplified courtesy to all, gracious consideration, easy skill with which he presided, numerous interpolations, and fidelity in discharging his duties."

Start: 149 members. End: 153 members.

## 1959–60: Hurricane causes big damage

This year was the one in which Hurricane Gracie hit Charleston, caused severe damage and added to the excitement of the year.

The Ashley Hall Red Choir made its annual visit in December; ladies were not invited. Rotarians manned a kettle for the Salvation Army. Children's Day was celebrated December 22 and each child brought a gift for the Salvation Army to distribute to needy families. Door prizes consisting of trips to Nassau were won by Rotarians Bagwell and Bailey.

The District Conference was held in March in Charleston. On Thursday, there was a special showing of *The Gazebo*. On Friday, visits were made to the Navy and Air Bases. On Saturday, the ladies were taken to visit the gardens. The conference was considered a very successful occasion.

The death of Rufus Barkley, a former president of the Club and an outstanding civic worker, was quite a shock to the community.

Member "Mac" Wiles was elected as the president of Newberry College. Charter member and past District Governor Buddy Thornhill entertained members with his comments about a South American tour.

President-elect Luther Rosebrock and John Orvin attended the Rotary International Convention in Miami. Along with Gus Blalock, they attended the District Assembly in Bennettsville.

Attendance dropped to 67 percent when Rotary joined other service clubs for the annual Armed Services Luncheon. After one meeting, the Club adjourned to tour the Southern Bell Telephone Company.

Thirty-two members had perfect attendance. Ron Reilly kept tabs on the seating arrangements and found that over 40 percent of members would sit at the same table each meeting.

Start: 153 members. End: 144 members.