**The Fort William Port Arthur Rotary Club**

**(No. 236)**

**1916-1924**

**Home Club of Rotary International  President Crawford McCullough 1921-22**

The city of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada (formerly the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William) is one of the pioneer cities of Rotary. Only 235 clubs ─ in the United States, Great Britain and Canada ─ preceded the establishment of Rotary there in 1916. The idea of a Rotary club in the twin cities originated with  J.L. Routley, an insurance executive in the City of Port Arthur. Routley had attended a Rotary meeting in the City of Toronto in the summer of 1915, and being much impressed with the club contemplated the establishment of a club in the twin cities. He sought information and guidance from the International  Association of  Rotary Clubs, and in the winter of 1915-16 distributed pamphlets and reading material about Rotary to various individuals in the two cities. Later he visited each of the gentlemen he figured worthy of becoming charter members, discussed the proposal with them, and invited them to an organizational meeting.

The organizational meeting was held in the Prince Arthur Hotel on 17 May, 1916 at 7:00 p.m. The band of the 141st Regiment, mustering in Port Arthur for overseas service, played during dinner and the meeting afterwards. Rotarians C. W. Oppel and Wm. C. McCarter from the Duluth, Minnesota Club attended the dinner and helped organize the Club.

The name of the Club was The Fort William Port Arthur Rotary Club. There were 23 charter members ─ 12 from Fort William and 11from Port Arthur. The first president was W.O. Matthews. The club alternated meetings each week between Port Arthur and Fort William, and it alternated presidents from each city. In 1915 the Rotary system of districts and governors, was established. The Fort William Port Arthur Rotary Club was assigned to District No. 4, an all-Canadian District that extended from Thunder Bay to the Albert-British Columbia border.

A charter member of the Fort William Port Arthur Rotary Club, Dr. Crawford McCullough  served as the club’s third president (1917-18), fourth governor of District No. 4 (1918-19), an President of Rotary International (1921-22), the second Canadian to hold that office. In 1920, the club sponsored the Rotary Club of Kenora.

Being the first, and for three years, the only service club in Thunder Bay (Thunder Bay Kiwanis Club was organized in 1919), the Fort William Port Arthur Club provided leadership in community service. During World War I, the club raised funds for war connected organizations such as the Red Cross, Blue Cross, Salvation Army, W.M.C.A.,  the Halifax Relief Fund, and it provided entertainment and assistance for returning veterans. The Club initiated a Christmas Cheer Fund, in both cities, and did much work both social and charitable.

Soon after the club was formed, a committee was established to investigate the feasibility of getting a road built through the bush from Thunder Bay to the United States boundary at Pigeon River, to connect with the road from Duluth, Minnesota to that point. The project was worked on until a dirt road was put through and a wooden bridge was built across the Pigeon River.  Built with the help of Minnesota Rotarians, the bridge was known for many years as the “outlaw bridge,” because it was built without international agreement or government approval. On 18 August 1917, a motorcade of 65 cars, carrying 240 people, accompanied by a pipe band and a mobile motor and tire repair shop, navigated the primitive highway, crossed the bridge and made their way to  Grand Marais, Minnesota, where the opening of the road and bridge was celebrated. Some years later the governments of Ontario and Minnesota replaced the wooden bridge with a “lawful” concrete bridge and established customs offices at each end of the bridge.

By 1923, the membership of the club had grown to 60. Because of the classification system of Rotary that limited only one member from each vocation in the two cities, it was decided to divide the club into two ─ a club in each city. The division was accomplished by the members from Port Arthur resigning from the club, en masse, and forming a new club. Probably unique in Rotary Global History, the division took place on 8 April 1924. Each club held its first separate meeting the following week. Crawford McCullough stayed in the Fort William Club, which kept the original charter. The charter of the new Port Arthur Rotary Club was presented by Crawford McCullough on 27 May 1924.

The two clubs have met continuously ever since. In 1969, the twin cities were united to form the city of Thunder Bay and the names of the clubs were changed to Thunder Bay (Port Arthur) and Thunder Bay (Fort William). In 1984, the clubs co-sponsored a third club ─Thunder Bay (Lakehead).