

E. F. Harris

Shanghai Rotary Club – President 1932-1933

Rotary International
Honorary Special Commissioner
1 July 1933 – 30 June 1934
1 July 1934 – 30 June 1935
1 July 1935 – 30 September 1935



E. F. Harris was a native of England, and was Manager of the North China Branch of Sun Life Assurance of Canada (加拿大永明人壽保險公司) located in Shanghai. An officer in the British Army in World War I, he was elected a Member of the Shanghai Municipal Council (上海公共租界工部局董事).

A Member of Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社), he served as Club President in 1932-1933. Later, he was appointed Honorary Special Commissioner of Rotary International for China, Hong Kong, and The Philippine Islands from 1 July 1933 until 30 September 1935, prior to the total 15 clubs were approved to form the 81st District of Rotary International on 1 October 1935.

A Message for Myself and Perhaps You

IT'S ABOUT A WARTIME LESSON LEARNED FROM RUSSIANS
IN SHANGHAI AND ITS APPLICATION TO ROTARY IN OUR TIME.

By E. F. Harris

Rotarian, Shanghai, China

WHEN I came out of a Japanese internment camp in Shanghai at the close of the war, I found my house occupied by the Soviet Club.

To describe it merely as a club is an understatement. It was a club—in the social sense—in the evenings only. By day it was a school, a library, a radio station, a clothing store, and a polyclinic with a fully qualified doctor, dentist, nurses, and dispensary. The aged and infirm found a haven of rest in the garden.

Since it was impossible immediately to find new premises to house these manifold activities, I had perforce to live with the Soviets until Christmas, 1945. Because of this association—and a very interesting association it proved to be—I am frequently asked the question, "How are we to get along with Russia?"

And invariably I reply that the best way to get along with Russia is to get along without Russia—and to do it supremely well.

If this answer seems disappointing rather than dramatic, humdrum rather than heroic, I can only respond that the events of the last few years have led me to the conclusion that there is no ready recipe for world peace. Neither is there any short cut. The pathway to peace is a process, not a prescription.

I had not always thought thus. For 20 years I was a poor Rotarian. I have wanted Rotary as an organization to embark on some dynamic and world-shaking venture. I have been anxious to launch the Rotary Ship in the troubled waters of the International Ocean. I would have preferred to see Rotary fail in the

attempt rather than fail to make the attempt. I have demanded a sign. And there has been no sign vouchsafed to me except the sign of the Rotary wheel of service.

I know now that I was wrong. Rotary in action—if it is to be three words and not two—can only be realized by Rotarians in action.

In the first flush of enthusiasm for an ideal we set up an organization, and expect that as an organization it will be able to do something—even to the extent of accomplishing miracles. And when it doesn't, we talk about failure. But an organization fails or succeeds to the extent that its members fail or succeed—no more and no less.

It is not true to say that the League of Nations was tried and found to be a failure. The truth is that it was found to be difficult and left untried. The League did not fail. The nations did. They turned away sorrowing (some of them) for they had great possessions—or hoped to have. Sacrifice might have saved the League; self-seeking could never do so.

And even with that greater league—the United Nations—it may well be that peace will not be secured from the top down until it has been accomplished from the bottom up.

This thought is encouraging as well as discouraging, for at least it means that there is work for all of us to do. "It never will rain roses. If we want more roses, we must plant trees."

That's what the Founder of Rotary, Paul Harris, did: he planted trees. Trees of friendship, in many parts of the world—trees that would blossom into international understanding. But he didn't expect the blossom to come first.

Castles in the air? That's where they should be. But that is also where they will stay unless we plant foundations under them. And the place to start on the foundations is at our own doorstep and frequently in the living room of our own home, before we even get to the doorstep.

The Chinese have a saying: "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. When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."

"HOW can we get along with Russia?" It's not a problem to most of us who ask that question. Our problem is to get along with Montreal and Minneapolis, with Calcutta and Chicago, with Kansas City and Kokomo.

"Getting along" is accomplished by individuals, not organizations.

And to end with the beginning: Any feeling of resentment—perhaps natural—that I might have had at finding my home turned into a Soviet Club has long since changed into one of deep satisfaction. For in healing the sick, clothing the naked, caring for the aged, and feeding the little children, those Soviet citizens of Shanghai have perhaps done more for the cause of international understanding than Molotov, Vishinsky, and Gromyko have accomplished in the General Assembly and Security Council of the United Nations.

Life is a staircase, not an escalator. The road is always uphill and there isn't even a ski tow. But that isn't any reason why we shouldn't start climbing. It is every reason why we should.

