

Rotary International President Percy Hodgson Visit to Hong Kong and Canton in 1949

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Percy Hodgson

The Presidential Travel

The pattern for a year marked with inspiration, enthusiasm and achievement, was set by Rotary International President 1949-1950 Percy Hodgson of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, U.S.A., when, as President Nominee, he met with and talked to the incoming district governors at the 1949 International Assembly.

So enthusiastic were they over the “Objectives of the Team for 1949-50”, in which President Hodgson set out the points he believed should be stressed, that they asked him to prepare a similar set of objectives for the clubs. This he did, and each three months sent a fresh copy of the objectives to all the district governors and to the clubs, with a letter reminding them of the importance of these objectives.

About mid-year, Hodgson asked the governors for a frank report on the acceptance of the objectives by their clubs. Information received from the governors, including specific examples of what many clubs had accomplished in putting the objectives into operation, letters and reports from clubs in various parts of the world, indicated a general acceptance of the objectives and splendid cooperation by the clubs in doing their utmost to achieve these goals.

The inter-city general forums, which the President encouraged district governors to organize, proved another effective means of bringing Rotary’s message and the magnitude of its program to the attention of thousands of Rotarians. Many successful forums were held in various parts of the world, each of these forums being led by a Past Director of Rotary International, selected by the President.

President Hodgson maintained his office in the Central Office in Chicago and spent as much time there as was possible in between his journeys to Rotary clubs in many lands. Having been deluged with invitations to visit clubs, and being convinced that a president could perform his

greatest service to the clubs and to Rotary world-wide by coming into direct contact with as many clubs as possible, President Hodgson prepared a travel itinerary which took him into many of the countries which had not been visited by a president of Rotary International in recent years. Mrs. Edith Hodgson accompanied him on all of his journeys.

Their travels, on which they visited clubs on all continents, with the exception of Australia, were divided into five itineraries, as follows:

1. Continental Europe – in August
2. The Orient, The Philippines and Hawaii – in September and October
3. Ibero America – in November and December
4. Canada and the United States – December, January, February And March
5. The Middle East, India, Pakistan, Italy, Great Britain and France – in April and May

The formal meetings which the President addressed were largely inter-city meetings, and frequently inter-district and inter-country meetings. Thus, he was able to contact all or most of the clubs in the districts or countries visited. On several occasions, informal breakfast or luncheon meetings were held at the airports, one such being held under a tent in India. Frequently, in addition to the regularly scheduled meeting, informal discussions and general Rotary forums were conducted by the President. His itineraries included clubs of all sizes, and many new clubs as well as clubs which had been in existence since the early days of Rotary.

Visit to the 57th District (South China, Hong Kong and Macao)

Commencing 1 July 1949, all Rotary International districts were re-numbered. The 96th District was replaced by the 57th District which was compiled with clubs located in these geographical territories: Southern provinces of the Republic of China (中華民國)---Fukien (*Fujian*) (福建省), Kwangtung (*Guangdong*) (廣東省), Kwangsi (*Guangxi*) (廣西省), Kweichow (*Guizhou*) (貴州省), Yunnan (雲南省); plus the British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港) as well as the Portuguese Territory Macao (葡萄牙領土澳門) located at the south China coast. “Gem” George Ernest Marden (*Hong Kong*) (*Shanghai Rotary Club President 1928-1929*) was the District Governor in 1949-1950.

There were 12 Rotary clubs out of 13 still functioning: Hong Kong (香港) (1931); Canton (廣州) (1932); Foochow (福州) (1933); Amoy (廈門) (1933); Swatow (汕頭) (1936); Wuchow (梧州) (1936); Kunming (昆明) (1937); Kweiyang (貴陽) (1945); Macau (澳門) (1947); Liuchow (柳州) (1948); Kowloon (九龍) (1948). Except that Kweilin (桂林) (1944) was already terminated on 4 June 1946.

Rotary International President Percy Hodgson and his lady Edith commenced their global visits as scheduled. In September-October, they travelled to the Orient including the 57th District. In the Far East, the couple spent 16 days in Japan and met Rotarians of 16 clubs in several cities. All clubs in Japan were re-admitted to Rotary International gradually since 1947 after the World War II. Hodgson was happy to present some of the charters during his visit. Then, the couple flew to Hong Kong.

Upon their arrival on October 6, it so happened that was the day of the Moon Festival (the 15th Day of the 8th Lunar Month) (中秋節) which was a public holiday in Hong Kong. The couple was first welcomed by President Fung Ping-Fan (馮秉芬), of Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社), in a reception held in his residence.

That was a gathering of joy and happiness. One of the American guests described in his

book 《The Chinese Journals of L. K. Little》 : “... to cocktail party at Mr. Fung Ping-Fan’s house for Mr. and Mrs. Percy Hodgson of Pawtucket. Percy is President of Rotary International, and is making a world tour. Mrs. Hodgson is very pretty, and looked most charming under the glare of the photographers’ lights (a barbarous custom!). They are a good-looking couple, and I was proud of my fellow Pawtucketeers ...”

No doubt, on the days after the presidential couple paid the official visit to meet the 104 members of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (see the photo below).



October 1949, Hong Kong – Rotary International President Percy Hodgson (at podium) and lady Edith (at his right) addressed The Rotary Club of Hong Kong where President Fung Ping-Fan was presiding (in front of the club banner), and District Governor George E. Marden appeared at the right margin of the photo.

After the visit to Hong Kong, the presidential couple dropped into Canton (*Guangzhou*) (廣州) for a one-day visit with District Governor Gem and Rotarians. The state power in China was already controlled by the Communists and the People’s Republic of China (中華人民共和國) was declared established on 1 October 1949. At the time, Canton was not yet practically “liberated” until 14 October 1949 -- though the People’s Liberation Army was already in the outskirts and ready to battle into this ancient city, and the Canton Rotary Club (廣州扶輪社) was still alive. Here below is what President Percy Hodgson, after the global travel, reported on his visit:

In the past eleven and a half months, Edith and I have travelled approximately 200,000 miles. We have visited 79 different countries, and have contacted, directly or indirectly, thousands of Rotary clubs. We estimate that I have spoken to about 75,000 Rotarians, in addition to those who may have heard me on the radio.

Hong Kong was jammed with refugees from war-torn China. Business was booming, rentals were sky high. After meeting with the 104 Rotarians of the teeming port, we took off, with District Governor "Gem" Marden, for Canton an hour away by air. With the Red Army circling the port city, we met with Canton Rotarians for a Chinese luncheon that I shall never forget. What would happen that next day was anybody's guess, but for the moment the one thing these keen men wanted to talk and hear about was Rotary.

How could one appraise accurately the full significance of that incident in China, when members of the Rotary Club of Canton listened intently to the Rotary story, and stayed afterwards as long as we could remain, in order to ask intelligent and forward-looking questions about Rotary -- while, at the very moment, a conquering army was at the gates of the city -- and within 24 hours after we left Canton the city fell?

Canton fell that night, a few hours after we were back in Hong Kong. I am happy to report, however, that at this writing Rotary in China, which numbers 22 clubs, is still functioning and that our fellows there are continuing to meet."



13 October 1949, Canton — R. I. President Percy Hodgson (bow tie) and lady Edith accompanied by Canton Rotarians laid wreath at the Huanghuagang Mausoleum of the 72 Martyrs (黃花崗七十二烈士墓) (the Revolutionists of 1911)

Amid the closing months of the Chinese Civil War, and before the state capital Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京) was captured on 23 April 1949 by the People's Liberation Army of the Communist Party of China, the Central Government retreated to Canton as the provisional capital of the Nationalist Republican China. Though on 1 October 1949 there was the establishment of the People's Republic of China declared in Peking (*Beijing*) (北京), the Civil War was not yet ceased completely in the southern provinces.

On 14 October 1949, the People's Liberation Army defeated the National Army in Canton and controlled the city. The communist People's Government was soon established. The Canton Rotary Club carried on their activities as usual. But until 10 February 1950, the Club wrote to District Governor Marden telling the Club was suspended from meetings due to the pending of the completion of the registration with the local authorities. This was in accordance with a Government notification to the effect that all organizations should so suspend. While the non-Chinese members were leaving the country gradually, the local Chinese citizens were not much interested to carry on due to the change of the political environment. The Rotary Club was in loss of members and was ultimately terminated by Rotary International on 21 December 1950.

Percy Hodgson

Percy Hodgson was President and Treasurer of the Parkin Yarn Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, U.S.A. He was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, England, received his early education in England, and completed his studies in the United States.

He had been a member of the Rotary Club of Pawtucket since 1932 and was a Past President of the Club. He had served Rotary International as President (1949-1950), Director, District Governor, and as committee chairman and member. He was Chairman of the Magazine Committee for 1953-1954 and a Trustee of the Rotary Foundation for 1950-1955.

As President of Rotary International, Dr. Hodgson travelled more than 200,000 miles in 79 countries to address Rotary Clubs, and was decorated by the Governments of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Lebanon and Peru.

In 1950, he was first recipient of the Rhode Island State College award for "outstanding world-wide leadership and service in the public welfare." He had received a Doctor of Laws degree from Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, California, and a Doctor of Humanities degree from Silliman University in Dumaguete, The Philippines.

In Pawtucket, Dr. Hodgson was a Past President of the Business Chamber, President of the Visiting Nurses Association and Chairman of the Mayor's Advisory Committee. He was a Director of the Boys' Club, the Salvation Army, Y.M.C.A., Old Slater Mill Association and Old Colony Co-operative Bank, Trustee of the Rhode Island Textile Association, Past President of the Rhode Island Federation of Craftmen's Clubs and Vice-Chairman of the Rhode Island Development Association. He was a trustee of the Eastern Utilities Association of Boston, Massachusetts, and a Director of the Blackstone Vall Gas and Electric Company, the Eastern Edison Electric Company in Boston, Massachusetts, St. Andrew's School for Boys in Barrington, Rhode Island, and St. Dunstan's School for Boys in Providence, Rhode Island.