



When we look back at the beginnings of Soroptimist in 1921, many people are surprised that a women's organization includes a man in its origin story. Stuart Morrow was Soroptimist's man who helped propel the first clubs to their founding.

Early Life

William Stuart Morrow was born in Dublin, Ireland.

- Emigrated to California in 1885.
- Became a member of the San Francisco Rotary club in 1908. Profession listed as Collections Agent.
- Returned to Dublin after the dissolution of his business.



Morrow was a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland

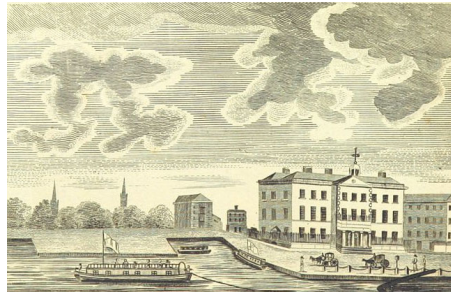
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Bright Past, Brilliant Future

Rotary was a large part of Morrow's pre-Soroptimist life. According to Rotary International the San Francisco Club was only the 2nd Rotary Club to be formed. The first club was the Chicago Club which formed in 1905.

We cannot find much information about what brought him to California or why his business eventually failed. Although his Rotary designation was listed as collection's agent Morrow was also known to be a lawyer.

Bringing Rotary to Dublin



Grand Canal Hotel in Dublin, where the club meetings were originally held.

February 11, 1911 - Dublin Club formed; Stuart Morrow served as Organizing Secretary.

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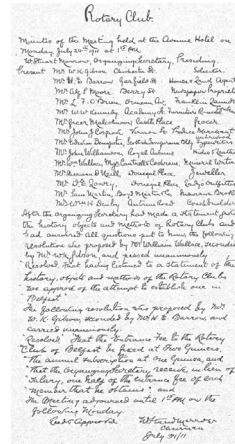
The Dublin Rotary club that Stuart Morrow helped to charter was the first Rotary club established overseas. He is credited with helping Rotary become an international organization.

Records state that Stuart Morrow was paid a salary of 9 Guineas for his work (one guinea was equal to 1 pound and 1 shilling).

Spreading Rotary

Later Morrow became a paid club organizer for Rotary.

- Organized Belfast club in 1912.
- Organized clubs in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham.



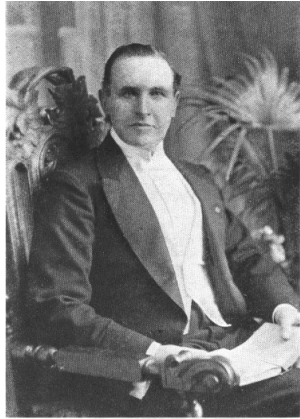
Minutes from the Belfast Club's first meeting.

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Roger Levy recorded a speech made by Stuart Morrow in Glasgow “The two essential features of a Rotary Club are: first, that the membership should be confined to one representative of each profession or business: and second, that the primary object of the club should be the promotion of the business interests of the members.” These features eventually became a part of the earliest Soroptimist clubs.

Falling out With Rotary



*W. STUART MORROW,
Secretary Birmingham Rotary.*

Morrow while working in Birmingham

- Not all clubs like Morrow's club rules; British Clubs did not like calling people by their first names.
- Questions arose about the amount of money Morrow made as an organizer.
- Eventually these clubs paid off Morrow as an organizer and cut him out of further involvement with their clubs.

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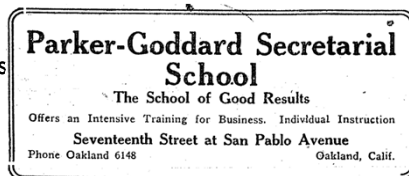
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Only one source mentions this but, Rotary club historian William J. Mountin said that he "lost support from club members when they found out he was making a living by selling memberships for a guinea a piece."

This model of club organization, with a main focus for Morrow on money would color his club organizer career and follow him as he organized Soroptimist clubs later.

Continuing to Organize

- Morrow returned to California
- Possibly continued organizing clubs
- Spring of 1921: approached the owners of the Goddard-Parker Secretarial School in Oakland while seeking to organize a new club.



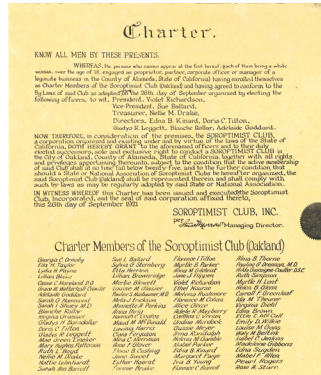
Because of his encounter with Goddard, Morrow began speaking to business women in the area about joining a service club.

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There are no real records about Stuart Morrow between his leave from the European Rotary clubs and the Spring of 1921. This makes it hard to say if he was organizing clubs or what types of clubs he was organizing—whether for Rotary, or perhaps early Optimist clubs. Soroptimist tradition says he was in the process of organizing a club when he walked into the Goddard-Parker Secretarial School in Oakland, expecting to find potential male members. A conversation with one of the co-owners, Adelaide Goddard led to the idea for a women’s club similar to Rotary.

Soroptimist is Born



Alameda County Charter 1921

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October 1921: 80 women sign charter for first Soroptimist Club, in Alameda County (Oakland). Morrow becomes Managing Director of Soroptimist.

With all his experience as an organizer Morrow was able to start this new women's club. He still had ties with Rotary as well as the Chamber of Commerce, which helped him find prospective members among the business and professional women in the community.

Morrow also took care to manage the business side of the organization, and incorporated Soroptimist so that he owned the rights to the organization.

Gladys Barndollar, in particular, attended the initial meetings and used the connections from her printing company, to assist in getting the original 80 women who chartered the first club.

These early Soroptimists were constrained by one of Morrow's conditions, which would have been all too common for those times: members had to be white women. This is something that would change soon after Stuart Morrow left the organization. And international clubs were a priority for one prospective member, Violet Richardson, who refused to sign the charter until she had Morrow's promise that there would be international clubs.

California and Beyond

- Chartered San Francisco club, March 1922
- Los Angeles club, July 1922
- Hired Helena Gamble to organize more clubs in California and headed East
- Chartered Washington D.C. club, November 1922
- New York City club, June 1923



Oda Falconer, one of the Soroptimist presidents charged with running Soroptimist while Morrow left to organize more clubs.

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Morrow chartered clubs in San Francisco and Los Angeles, then left Fanny McGee Williams, Oda Falconer, and Violet Richardson Ward, the presidents of the first three clubs, in charge of Soroptimist in California. He hired Soroptimist Helena Gamble of the Alameda County club to organize more clubs in California. Then Morrow traveled East to establish clubs there before heading to Europe.

Establishing International Clubs

- Chartered London club, February 1924
- Had difficulty starting the Paris club, but succeeded with a charter in October 1924



Morrow's letterhead while working in Paris.

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Morrow made good on his promise to Violet Richardson and headed to Europe to establish clubs there. The first international Soroptimist club was chartered in London in February 1924.

When Morrow went to Paris in 1924 women did not yet have the right to vote. In a letter to Helena Gamble he explained that many unmarried women were not allowed to go out without a chaperone, and there were not as many professional women to join a club like this. He asked Helena and any other Soroptimists to send him names of connections that might help with get more women to join.

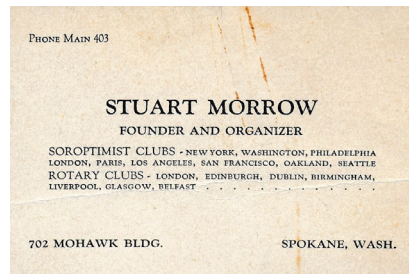
Returning to the States

Morrow established clubs in

- Philadelphia, April 1925
- Seattle, October 1925
- Spokane, February 1926
- Kansas City, May 1926
- Detroit, September 1926
- Houston, May 1927

He hired women to assist in organizing clubs in areas close to them.

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Stuart Morrow's business card from while organizing Soroptimist in Spokane.

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Helena Gamble was the first woman Morrow put in charge of organizing clubs. After his return to the United States following the Paris club charter, he jumped around to other states chartering clubs and finding women who were interested in becoming club organizers. He often started the work in a city, and then left a club organizer to complete the charter.

Morrow hired Clara Davis to charter the Vancouver club; his secretary Alva O'Brien helped establish the Detroit and Spokane clubs. Leah R. Thies organized the Seattle Club.

Putting the Clubs in the Hands of the Women

- 1926: West Coast clubs met in Oakland to discuss if the time was right to become an international organization. Many felt they could not move forward until they had the rights to Soroptimist.
- Violet Richardson suggested if Morrow was offered a financial settlement he would likely hand over the rights to the organization.

Conference Called to Order at 11:00 Sharp.
Events scheduled for Conference
on August 25th and 26th.
No Guests.
Wednesday, August 25, 1926
Luncheon, 12:30, Hotel Oakland, for all mem-
bers of Soroptimists Clubs, Reservations must
be in by Monday, August 23rd, Noon - \$1.00.
Reception at 8:30 P.M., at Hattie Lehnhardt's,
2705 Telegraph Ave., Reservations must be
in by Monday Noon, August 23rd.

Agenda from the 1926 Soroptimist Conference

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As each club was chartered, Morrow was emphatic that they were independent, and the clubs could determine on their own when an international organization should be formed. Stuart Morrow was not able to attend the 1926 meeting and asked for Violet Richardson to represent him at the meeting. Morrow not attending made many of the women upset that they could not talk to him or ask him questions about his work.

Many of them felt they did not understand what it would take to become an international organization, and felt they were hindered from make any major decisions without Morrow there. This led to a discussions among the members about how important it would be to obtain the rights to the organization from Morrow, which Morrow had acknowledged being open to in previous conversations.

Morrow's Dealings with Money

- According to minutes from the 1926 conference, some members under the impression Morrow was charging more for new clubs he was organizing.
- Later in a letter to the first federation president, Helena Gamble stated when she "arranged with the three Soroptimists presidents to organize clubs, in 1923, they felt Mr. Morrow had gotten too much money"

The Bureau therefore suggested to Mr. Morrow that the appointment of a temporary finance committee would be a more businesslike method of handling the funds, and would also protect him against any possible implications about his own motives. To this Mr. Morrow made violent protest, declaring the suggestion a personal affront, and left the office, refusing indignantly to accept the criticism in the spirit in which it was offered.

Letter from the Better Business Bureau in 1921 on their interaction with Morrow.

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Morrow's complicated relationship with the monetary side of organizing clubs followed him to Soroptimist. The claims in 1926 were similar to the ones that Rotary Clubs overseas made years before when they eventually ended their business relationship with him.

Correspondence between Helena Gamble and Stuart Morrow also showed that she questioned Morrow about why he was receiving money for clubs that other people were organizing. He told her he had to pay a lot of money from his "private funds" and it was meant to balance that out.

The Morrow Agreement

“Mr. Morrow is Out”

- A committee formed to determine Morrow’s price to give up organizational rights.
- After negotiation he agreed to sell his rights for \$5,500.

At the 1927 conference, the agreement was made and Morrow gave up control of Soroptimist.

The following contributions made up the purchase fund:

Los Angeles.....	150 members	\$1,387.50
Seattle	101 members	934.25
Oakland	94 members	869.50
Sacramento	68 members	629.00
San Francisco.....	67 members	619.75
Portland	45 members	416.25
San Jose.....	41 members	379.25
Spokane	36 members	333.00
602		\$5,568.50

The money as received was deposited in the Bank of Italy, Los Angeles, Calif., to the account of “International Federation of Soroptimist Clubs, Mae Carvell, Fiscal Agent.”

On August 2, 1927, \$5,500.00 was paid into escrow to be paid by the Bank of Italy to Stuart Morrow—when certain documents, etc., were signed or turned in by him. All papers were forthcoming—the money was paid, the papers received—the escrow closed about 1:40 p. m.—Mr. Morrow is out.

1927, Seattle Soroptimist newsletter shows how much money the clubs put together to gain the rights from Morrow

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The 1926 meeting had put the possibility of buying out Morrow’s rights to the organization on the table. Negotiations began, and a further meeting was called in 1927 in San Francisco to reach an agreement to obtain Morrow’s rights to the organization. Morrow was adamant he receive proper compensation. He noted, “I have given my time up exclusively for the last six years to founding the Soroptimist Club, and to the organization and development of its various branches in the United States, Canada, England, and France, and that this work up to this provided merely my actual living and traveling expenses, beyond which I have not even one dollar to show for my six years of work.”

Morrow offered the following options: “Per capital tax for one dollar per annum to continue during my life (I am now 71 years old) establishing, maintaining headquarters in Los Angeles or .50 without this obligation. Or Surrender rights and interest with a lump sum of 6,000.” This lump sum fee was negotiated down to \$5,500.

The following clubs, totaling 602 members pledged themselves to assume the payment of \$5,500 to Morrow by August 2.

Oakland-Berkeley
Sacramento
San Jose

San Francisco
Los Angeles
Seattle
Portland
Spokane

Morrow on Organizing

"I decided to aim always at quality rather than numbers, but at the same time never to leave a club until it had been placed upon an absolutely permanent basis, irrespective of how long a time it occupied or how inadequate the financial returns. I also resolved to cover first the leading cities of the world rather than limit my activities to any one state or group of states. The prestige that has thus accrued to the Soroptimist Club places it in the forefront of all women's organizations."

—Stuart Morrow



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Morrow's philosophy on building new clubs.

Stuart Morrow's Legacy

Not much is known about Morrow's life after his separation from Soroptimist. He continued to reside in California and died in 1942 at the age of 87.

Stuart Morrow helped to make Rotary an international organization as well as establishing Soroptimist and organizing many of the first clubs.



Original 1921 Soroptimist logo



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Many positive changes came to Soroptimist after Stuart Morrow left: Two federations, one in North America, and one in Europe, were established in 1928, as was Soroptimist International.

The first club chartered in North America after Morrow sold his rights, the Berkeley Club, was the first club to receive a charter that made no mention of race as a qualification for membership.

Members took over the duties of organizing new clubs, including Blanche Edgar from Sacramento who helped organize 103 clubs throughout the world, and Martha Servis from Philadelphia, who also served as the federation's first executive secretary. Now with five federations throughout the world, Soroptimist thrives as its members seek and work toward a better world for women and girls.

