

## This Day in History... June 7, 1917

### The Lions Club Hold First National Meeting

On June 7, 1917, the Lions Club held their first national meeting in Chicago. Dr. William P. Woods of Evansville, Indiana created the first iteration of the Lions. He established the Royal Order of Lions on August 8, 1911, as a fraternal organization. After a few years, however, the group decided they wanted to focus more on service and Woods worked on establishing Lions Clubs around 1915.

The oldest continuously operating Lions Club was established on January 18, 1916, in Austin, Texas. That October, Dr. Woods and several others incorporated the International Association of Lions Clubs in Indiana. By June 1917, there were at least 27 clubs in nine or more states.

During this same time, Melvin Jones, a member of the Business Circle of Chicago, wanted to become more involved in his community and the world, and he wanted other businessmen to join him. As he described it, "What if these men who are successful because of their drive, intelligence and ambition, were to put their talents to work improving their communities?"

So he began writing to the members of other groups around the country, inviting them to meet in Chicago to form a national service organization. That meeting came on June 7, 1917, at the La Salle Hotel. Jones invited members of several organizations, including Dr. Woods, and specifically mentioned that he hoped to line this new organization up with the Lions.

During the course of the meeting, the attendees unanimously adopted a resolution to become part of the International Association of Lions Clubs. Then in July, Dr. Woods, as president and founder of the organization, called on all the members to join him in Dallas, Texas for the first convention of Lions Clubs. Held from October 8 to 10, the convention hosted 24 Lions Clubs. During that convention, they officially adopted the name "International Association of Lions Clubs" as well as a constitution, by-laws, a code of ethics, and an emblem. One of the ideas they adopted was that "No club shall hold out the financial betterment of its members as its object." In other words, the goal of a Lion's Club could never be individual profit.

Among the early projects for many Lions Clubs was supporting the war effort, as America had just entered World War I the same year the organization was founded. Back home, the Lions sold war bonds and collected reading materials to send the servicemen overseas.

In 1918, the Lions held their second convention in St. Louis, Missouri. The organization had already grown significantly since it's founding, and they realized the need for a way to share information between local clubs. So they created the Lion Magazine, with Melvin Jones as editor.

Although its name was the International Association of Lions Clubs, the group didn't become truly international until 1920. That year they established the Border Cities Lions Club in Ontario. Other Canadian Lions Clubs quickly followed.

Another major milestone happened in 1925 when Helen Keller addressed the Lions international convention in Cedar Point, Ohio. Keller challenged the clubs to become Knights of the Blind, and they quickly voted to adopt Sight Conservation and Work for the Blind. The Lions were so moved by her plea they made her an honorary Lion and called her the First Lady of Lionism. They named Anne Sullivan the Second Lady of Lionism. Ever since the Lions have dedicated much of their time and efforts to helping the blind.

In 1926, China became the third nation to join the Lions and they were quickly followed by Mexico and Cuba. In 1945, the Lions helped the United Nations found the Non-Governmental Organizations. Despite initially inviting women to join the Lions at their first annual convention, they rescinded the invitation the following year. It wasn't until 1987 that women were officially invited to join the Lions.

Today, the International Association of Lions Clubs is the world's largest service organization with about 1.4 million members in more than 44,500 clubs in over 200 countries. Their activities include sight preservation, working with the blind, drug awareness, hearing conservation, working with the deaf, citizenship, and more. Lions Clubs International also raises money for disaster victims and provides vocational training for the handicapped and the poor.



*Issued to publicize the Lions' Search for Peace essay contest. It also marked the organization's 50th anniversary.*

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