

# *The J. Fergus Gifford Shoe & Stocking Fund*

Adapted from an article by club secretary Earl Lawrence dated July 26, 1939

Lynn Rotarian J. Fergus Gifford noticed a small boy gazing into the window of a Lynn shoe store. Stopping for a moment Fergus discovered that the youngster's shoes were in tatters. In questioning the youngster as to his interest in the contents of the window, Fergus received the surprising reply that the youngster was wondering how he could earn enough money to buy himself a pair of shoes, further commenting that his folks had no money and that no one in his family was working. The story told by the boy so touched Fergus that he took him by the hand, escorted him into the store and had him fitted with a pair of shoes, and sent him on his way a happier youngster.

This experience weighed heavily on Fergus' mind, and realizing that the condition of the boy whom he had befriended was echoed in many homes in Lynn, he suggested to his club mates the raising of a fund for the purchase and distribution of shoes as Christmas gifts to needy children. His suggestion was adopted, and Christmas of 1919 many children were made happier through the efforts of Lynn Rotary.

When the club realized how well their Christmas project was received they decided to make it a permanent project and appointed Fergus as General Chairman.

In 1921 Fergus was killed in an automobile accident on the way to the Rotary meeting. Immediately action was taken for a greater effort in the work he had un-

dertaken and was so cheerfully carrying on. The practice of a voluntary subscription to the fund by members in celebration of their birthdays was inaugurated and the resultant effort enabled a monthly distribution instead of an annual one.

To further this work the effort was incorporated as a memorial to Fergus and when this was written in 1993 has its own board of directors and a substantial endowment fund.

Due to the changes in our government and charitable institutions much of the work performed originally by the J. Fergus Gifford Fund is now performed by various city or state welfare organizations.

Distribution of shoes per se is no longer necessary by a private organization and so the emphasis has been shifted to seeking those individuals that need special shoes not provided for by government financing.

Remarkably enough, even in 1993 there is a decided need for assistance for special pediatric shoes and services for those people not fortunate enough to be able to afford such care on their own.

The J. Fergus Gifford Shoe and Stocking Fund has been able to provide help in the Lynn community these 80 years plus, thanks to one man who had the caring to stop and help one little boy so long ago.

*PDG Eugene Hastings May 2007*