The start of Rotary in South America

Rotary extended its reach to South America when the Rotary Club of Montevideo, Uruguay, was chartered on 1 February 1919.

Rotarians had been interested in expanding to South America as early as 1916, and had focused on Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. But the first club was instead chartered in Uruguay, thanks to the efforts of Herbert P. Coates.

Coates, a native of England, had lived in South America for many years.

He became acquainted with Rotary while on a business trip to Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, in 1916. He found that many businessmen in the city were busy with the Rotary Convention taking place there.

Intrigued, he arranged to visit Rotary headquarters and asked about starting a club in Uruguay.

Coates returned to Montevideo with approval to start a club, and his work led to an organizational meeting in July 1918. That December, he and 21 other charter members submitted the club's formal application to Rotary.