

Illinois-Eastern Iowa District History

St. Francisville was just like thousands of other rural cities that were close knit, conservative, and proud of a rich heritage. Part of this heritage was their local Kiwanis Club. Samuel Gray, a member of the St. Francisville Kiwanis Club, had returned from a recent Kiwanis International Convention where he had heard others talk about the success of these young men's organizations. Within weeks, Gray was speaking with the principal of the St. Francisville High School and its students. By early October of 1946, the pieces were finally starting to fall together and on October 23, 1946, the St. Francisville High School Key Club received Charter Number 0177 making it the first club in the state of Illinois. Little did Gray and the sixteen charter members realize that the forming of this frail club would be the start of the Illinois-Eastern Iowa District of Key Club International.

Word of the success of this club traveled quickly, and the growth of the Illinois clubs was fast. The growth was first evident in Kiwanis Division Thirteen where the new club Olney joined St. Francisville. DeKalb and Rock Island soon followed as Key Clubs began developing in different areas. So rapid was the growth that by May 1, 1949, there were sixteen clubs from Metropolis to Chicago. It was at this point, some three years since the St. Francisville charter date, which it was decided a district should be formed. Kiwanians and Key Clubbers joined together in the crucial planning that lie ahead.

By early 1950, the foundation had been laid for the Illinois-Eastern Iowa District and a district convention was called for March, 1950, in Springfield, Illinois. During the convention, John Greene of Peoria Central High School was elected the first governor. He led a rather small board consisting of John Tintoff of Peoria Central as Secretary and George Walbright of Metropolis as Treasurer. At this time there were no lieutenant governors serving on the board. Despite this fact, however, six new clubs were formed under the John Green Board.

This expansion led to a second convention to be held at the St. Nicholas Hotel in Springfield, Illinois. At the close of this convention on March 29, 1951, James McFarland emerged as the Illinois-Eastern Iowa District's second Governor. The expansion of the Illinois-Eastern Iowa District was stymied in early 1951 when the North Central Association refused to endorse Key Clubs. When the North Central Association met in March of 1951, Samuel Gray, the founder of Key Clubbing in Illinois, was present with a survey that changed the Association's opinion. Personally conducting tests, Gray surveyed principals throughout the state who had Key Clubs in their school and brought the Association to the clear result that Key Club ranked at the top of the list of extracurricular activities. As a result of his work, Gray would later go on to a second term as an Illinois-Eastern Iowa District Key Club Chairman.

With the North Central Association confrontations behind them, the I-I District Key Clubbers filled Chicago's Edgewater Beach Hotel and elected George Mayer of Steinmetz High School as their third governor. Two months later on June 23, 1952, as the I-I District's governor, Mayer welcomed Key Clubbers to the Ninth Annual Key Club International Convention in Chicago, Illinois.

Two years later at the Eleventh Annual Key Club International Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the I-I District gathered to secure the office of International Trustee for their candidate, James L. Davis.

When the results of the House of Delegates were announced, Davis, of Lane Technical Key Club in Chicago had been elected as an International Trustee. He was the first International officer ever elected from the I-I District. In 1956, provisions were made for ten lieutenant governors, which changed the number of district officers from three to thirteen and made it more closely resemble the Kiwanis District. At the Tenth Annual District Convention in 1960, the standard form of district bylaws was changed so that the number of permissible lieutenant governors automatically conformed to the number of Kiwanis divisions in the district. One provision to this change was that there had to be an organized Key Club in the Kiwanis division in order to have a lieutenant governor. At the Seventeenth Annual District Convention in 1967, the George A. Payton Award and the Arthur L. Himmel Outstanding Lieutenant Governor Award were given for the first time.

On February 1, 1967, the I-I District chartered its first club in Iowa. This club was the Dubuque High School Key Club in Dubuque, Iowa.

The I-I was notorious for having only trustees on the International Board. At the 1967 International convention in Louisville, Kentucky, Steve Gilula campaigned hard for the office of International President. Although he was defeated, it marked the first time in memory that anyone from the I-I District ran for International President. In 1977, the I-I went through several important changes. In February of 1977, the Kiwanis International Board voted to allow females in Key Club. This was an important change as Key Club existed for fifty-two years without females. It expanded Key Club International to a greater number of members. When the I-I District was formed, the divisions did not conform to the Kiwanis divisions. So in 1977, the divisions were renumbered to resemble that of the Kiwanis District. This renumbering made it much easier for the Key Club District to communicate with the Kiwanis District.

After more than five decades of Key Clubs in Illinois and Eastern Iowa, we may begin to see the fruits of progress started in St. Francisville in 1946. We saw a district that started with sixteen clubs and approximately five hundred members turn into one of the strongest districts in all of Key Club International. We should strive to fulfill the unlimited potential that exists in our I-I District.