

# In Good Company

*Celebrating Potential Centennials in 2025*



It is a remarkable feat for any enterprise to survive and thrive for a century. Consider what the world has witnessed over the last 100 years: two world wars, the rise of air travel, a man on the moon, and instant, global connectivity.

The last century has also witnessed Hong Kong's development from quiet trading port to global powerhouse, in tandem with the rise of some of its largest companies. While historians mark 1925 as the year of Hong Kong's general strike, in which unions and students demanded of the British better working conditions and other freedoms, it was also a time of population growth and a developing sense of ambition in the territory.

Amidst the backdrop of post-war recovery and an expanding global economy, many companies were born in 1925 that would go on to leave an indelible mark on the world's business landscape.

As the Club approaches our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2025, let's explore the potential centennials—companies founded in 1925—that may soon celebrate with us a remarkable milestone of 100 years in operation.

These companies have weathered decades of challenges, innovations, and transformations, and, like The

American Club, symbolize resiliency and adaptability in an ever-changing world.

### Hong Kong Beginnings

In 1925, the **Hong Kong Telephone Company**, started its journey as one of Hong Kong's largest telecom providers. According to their company

milestones, they acquired China and Japan Telephone and Electric Co., Ltd. that year, and the new, larger company was granted a 50-year exclusive license to provide domestic telephone services.

For the next 75 years, HKTC expanded its operations, merging



Showing Hongkong Telephone Company's exhibit at the recent British Empire Fair held in Hongkong

*Photo credit: published in The Far Eastern Review, September 1933, with thanks to Hugh Farmer and The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group.*

with Cable & Wireless in 1984 before becoming a part of PCCW in 2000. HKT, as it's now known, is one of Hong Kong's leading providers of broadband and mobile services.

Several other Hong Kong companies were also flourishing in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among them the **Hysan** conglomerate. In 1923, Lee Hysan acquired his first piece of land in Causeway Bay, a property known as East Point Hill. Today, the 100-year-old company—run by Hysan's granddaughter Irene Lee—is still synonymous with property and Causeway Bay.

For the **HKF Group**, what began as a humble ferry operation with 11 small, wooden-hulled boats on January 1, 1924 has grown into a diversified company with businesses in property development, shipyard operations and healthcare. The Hongkong and Yaumatei Ferry Company Ltd. bought its first full-sized ferry in 1925. By obtaining exclusive transportation rights to Hong Kong waters in the 1920s, it quickly grew to become the largest Chinese-owned company in the world at that time.

### America & the Roaring Twenties

Across the Pacific, as 1925 dawned, Calvin Coolidge started his first full term as the 30<sup>th</sup> president of the U.S. He had succeeded Warren G. Harding, who died in office in 1923. President Coolidge's inauguration in early March 1925 was the first to be broadcast on the radio, a sign of the innovative and prosperous years that the U.S. was then enjoying.

With World War I a difficult memory and the Great Depression, and Dust Bowl several years away, Americans in 1925 were embracing new styles in fashion, music and dance, and were increasingly open to more relaxed social mores. Little wonder why this decade is called the Roaring Twenties!

It was a time of flappers and bootleggers, small government



Vaumatei Ferry, Hongkong.

Photo credit: Ko Tim-keung/HK Memory, with thanks also to Hugh Farmer and The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group.

and more leisure time. Only one month after the '25 presidential inauguration, *The Great Gatsby* was published. F. Scott Fitzgerald's celebrated novel set in the Jazz Age never mentioned "Coolidge Prosperity" but it certainly portrayed it.

Industrial production was a key to economic growth. Technical developments in manufacturing meant cars, washing machines and vacuum cleaners were rolling off the factory lines in larger and larger numbers.

### Born of an Age

In this go-go economic climate, the automobile was well and truly revolutionizing America. In 1925, **Chrysler**, formerly known as Maxwell, was formed in the Detroit suburbs of Michigan. Chrysler purchased Dodge in 1928 and went on to become one of America's 'Big Three' car companies, along with Ford and GM. In 2009, Chrysler merged with Fiat, an even older company established in Italy in 1899.

Alongside the rise of the 'Big Three', the National Automotive Parts Association was formed in Detroit in 1925 to service America's expanding car culture. You might recognize the company by its acronym—**NAPA Auto Parts**. Maybe you've even stopped in to one of NAPA's 6,000+ U.S. stores for a part!

If you're from the South, you might have a spot soft for another soon-to-be centennial: **Winn-Dixie**. The grocery store chain started in 1925

when William M. Davis bought a single store in Miami, Florida called Rockmoor Grocery.

Over the years, his sons expanded the business and, after merging with Dixie-Home stores in 1955, they renamed the chain Winn-Dixie. Today, Winn-Dixie is owned by the German supermarket giant Aldi, but still operates over 500 stores across Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

### Global Expansion

The 1920s was also a time of U.S. companies looking overseas for new markets. One American company that would go on to conquer the world was **Caterpillar Inc.**, still the world's largest manufacturer of construction equipment. Established in California in 1925, Caterpillar Inc. was the brainchild of two industrial pioneers—Benjamin Holt and C.L. Best—who joined forces to build tractors and other heavy machinery.

The new company combined innovative products with a strong dealer network, to support customers around the world. Today's CAT, now headquartered in Irvine, Texas, encompasses many brands and is well known for its popular workwear clothing and boots.

In 1925, car parts and cotton may have been top exports out of the U.S., but the country was also starting to export something else: culture.

The rise of the Hollywood movie studio had begun in earnest a few

years before. **Disney** (1923), **Warner Brothers** (1923) and **MGM** (1924)—today’s centennial celebrants—joined the well-established Paramount Pictures (1912) and Universal Studios (1912) to produce short and feature-length silent films, which were distributed around the world.

With the advent of sound in 1927, Hollywood entered a new and prosperous era. By the end of the decade, according to California historians, Hollywood was “the country’s fifth largest industry, attracting 83 cents out of every dollar Americans spent on amusement.”

**Dynamic Futures**

Meanwhile, back in our corner of the globe, another famous set of film brothers was setting up shop. In 1925, Runje, Runme, Runde and Run Run Shaw, who was just a teenager then, established the Tianyi Film Company in Shanghai. Their dream factory would expand into Southeast Asia, eventually becoming **Shaw Brothers Studio** of Hong Kong. Under Run Run’s stewardship, the studio produced over 800 films.

Run Run is no longer with us, but his family’s ‘almost’ 100-year-old legacy lives on at Shaw Studios, one of the largest film facilities in greater China.

As we anticipate the arrival of 2025 and the Club’s own 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, let us celebrate these potential centennials and honor the legacies they have built over the course of a century. Check out our Centennial website regularly for news at [100.americanclubhk.com](http://100.americanclubhk.com) and share your Club memories by submitting memorabilia, artefacts, photos for Project 100.

Companies that began in the Roaring Twenties have weathered the storms of war, witnessed the advent of game-changing technologies and, to this day, continue to meet the demands of the global marketplace.

A remarkable feat indeed.



*Creative Ambitions: The History of Mount Rushmore*

**Members may be familiar with our Mount Rushmore wall in the Town Club’s Presidents’ Room, but did you know the original, world-famous sculpture shares a founding date with the Club?**

In the mid-1920s, less than a million people lived in South Dakota. Farming and mining dominated in this sparsely populated state, and its rugged, natural scenery did not attract many tourists.

Doane Robinson was South Dakota’s state historian at that time, and he came up with the idea for a ‘colossal carving’ to draw visitors to his state. Known as ‘The Father of Mount Rushmore’, Robinson first contacted celebrated sculptor Gutzon Borglum in 1924 with the idea.

Borglum made two visits to the state, and by August 1925, he had settled on Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills for the site of his gigantic sculpture. By then, Robinson had secured state and federal permission for the project, and was working tirelessly to raise the necessary funds.

Robinson’s efforts were rewarded in October 1925 when Mount Rushmore was dedicated as a national monument. Two years later, President Coolidge came to South Dakota and participated in a second dedication ceremony where he personally handed over a set of drill bits to Borglum. The president also signed a bill authorizing federal funds for the project.

Mount Rushmore would take another 14 years to complete, but was an immediate success. In its first year, the carved faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt attracted almost 400,000 visitors—more than half the state’s population!

Nowadays, Mount Rushmore welcomes over two million tourists annually.

*For more information, check out the U.S. National Park Service’s extensive Mount Rushmore website, [nps.gov](http://nps.gov).*