

APPENDIX IV

Serving as an employee of the General Service Office from 1982 through the close of 1996, Frank M. accepted the promotion to Archivist on the retirement of Nell Wing at the end of 1982. His love of AA history, his cordial and abundant correspondence, and his encouragement and assistance to AA Archivists throughout the entire Fellowship generated a loving memory and respect from all who knew him. Many Area, District, and Group Archives were established during his GSO years. By supporting the growing general service AA Archives effort with resources of archival materials, providing expert knowledge of research direction, and insightfully sharing the relationship between archival ethics and AA principles, his pioneering service to our AA Archives is felt to this day. Frank's farewell address to the 1996 General Service Conference, with its Conference theme of "Preserving Our Fellowship—Our Challenge," is not edited and is reprinted with permission of AAWS, Inc.

G.S.O. Archives: Window on the Past, Guide to the Present, and Light for the Future

I appreciate this opportunity to share on something I feel particularly passionate about—our collective AA history and its relevancy to our survival; the anchor of our Fellowship. AA members relish histories, conscious or not. Our AA lives are spent, usually happily, listening endlessly to oral histories, hearing again, and again, the underlying theme: (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives. (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism. (c) That God could and would if He were sought (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 60).

In each of our individual stories we hear of drinking causing collapse; then, following a serendipitous contact with Alcoholics Anonymous, a complete transformation of our lives through the remarkably simple application of our Twelve Steps. A clear demonstration of alchemy, turning lead into gold. Doesn't it appear startlingly fresh with each telling? I have listened to these personal histories now for over a quarter of a century, with a deepening sense of wonder.

With a growing recognition that our collective history also merited retention, our Fellowship's Archives was opened in 1972 by Tom Sharpe, former general service trustee; Bob Hitchins, G.S.O. general manger; and Nell Wing, Bill W.'s secretary for 22 years and the first G.S.O. archivist. Bill W. stated the purpose was "...to keep the record straight so that myth does not predominate over fact as to the history of the Fellowship." (*Handbook for Setting Up an Archival Repository*, p. 13) In the ensuing years, the collection has proliferated. Each year has brought forth a fuller appreciation of just what we've got. Throughout the Fellowship, particularly in the last decade, the interest in our history has exploded. At last count, 63 of the 92 delegate areas had an active archivist. Many of these areas have district archivists as well. This body, joined by other interested historians, generates about 40 requests per week for detailed historical data on earlytimers, groups, districts, and areas. As some of you know from firsthand experience, our researcher, Noela Jordan, spends a good chunk of her life pouring over old directories, newspaper clippings, and files hunting up the "earliest" and "firsts." Not a few areas have published impressively detailed local histories that document AA's beginnings and growth. The memories of a multitude of earlytimers have been captured on tape. And joyously, under the skill and guidance of Judit Santon, our assistant archivist, a large beginning has been made on scanning our material for computer access, with

the aim of cutting future response time, making a larger body of material available, and avoiding physical damage to the fragile original documents in the collection. Is all this attention to our past necessary, some have asked?

As our co-founders, Bill and Bob, often stated, we, the present members of Alcoholics Anonymous, are links in an ancient chain of alcoholics stretching back through time. And haven't alcoholics been a perplexing problem for society for centuries? For example, Solomon laments, almost 3000 years ago, "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine...when it moveth itself aright. At the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things...They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me and I felt it not: When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." (Proverbs 23:29-35)

It seems that alcoholics baffled Solomon, and we continue to baffle others and ourselves. Drunkenness is not new to our shores. Someone observed that the Pilgrims stopped at Plymouth Rock not because they wanted to settle in Massachusetts, but because they had run out of booze.

Let's take a brief look through an archival window at some of the attempts over the ages to offer us sufferers some relief to our malady. In 1782, Benjamin Rush, prominent physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote a 17 page medical paper on our condition entitled, "The Effects of Ardent Spirits on the Human Body and Mind." In it, he terms alcoholism "a progressive and odious disease" and urges complete abstinence as the only effective treatment. The paper was widely circulated and well received, becoming a cornerstone document of the Temperance Movement. Yet, the points he made for abstinence from alcohol as

the treatment for a progressive disease seem to have been often forgotten and frequently challenged. In such a fickle public arena, it's nice to remind ourselves that AA, as such, has no opinion on the matter. Our Big Book terms it an illness. Whatever society may choose to call it, I seem to have gotten a bad case of it.

Another opportunity for us alcoholics was embodied in The Washingtonian Temperance Society, which had uncovered a workable formula. After a founding in March of 1840 by six drunks at Chase tavern in Baltimore, the group experienced a meteoric rise, recording 1,000 members before the end of that year. Abraham Lincoln addressed their second anniversary celebration. Their message was simple: 1) the drunkard could be rescued; he was weak, not wicked; 2) relating personal experience by a reformed drunkard was more moving and persuasive than a lecture by a well meaning nonalcoholic; 3) the simplicity of the pledge, requiring only one thing—personal abstinence; and 4) neutrality on the subjects of politics, religion, and the distributions and sale of alcoholic beverages. Not unlike the elements in our own Preamble.

Initially, the Washingtonian movement was virtually entirely made up of reformed “sots.” Later, others flocked to their meetings and took up the pledge and the “fellowship of sufferers” became diluted. In spite of their stated aims, to avoid politics, etc. many members took opposing sides publicly on alcohol reform and other issues. Importantly, there was no principle of anonymity to protect the society from erring members. Within eight or nine years, it was reported that the Washingtonians had “lost their thunder.” At their zenith, the press reported that there were 500,000 recovered sots in the Washingtonians. Since the population in those years was a recorded 20 million, I calculate that today AA would have to have 7,500,000 members in the U.S. alone to have

that same ratio. One can't help but ponder the fate of those members when the fire went out.

Another promising answer for the reclamation of the alcoholic was the Emmanuel Movement, founded by a clergyman psychologist, Elwood Worcester. In 1906, Worcester had a deep conviction that the physician and clergyman could work more effectively together in the treatment of functional ills; he had studied, interestingly enough, in Leipzig with Gustav Fechner, one of the pioneers in psychotherapy and one of Carl Jung's professors. His book outlining his theories, *Religion and Medicine, the Moral Control of Nervous Disorders*, appeared in 1908 and had nine printings in the year of publication. Alcoholism, not surprising to us, constituted the largest category within "nervous disorders."

Two successful graduates of the process were Courtney Baylor, who became the first paid alcoholism lay counselor, and Richard Peabody, a prominent lay therapist and author of the *Common Sense of Drinking*, a runaway best-seller of its day (1930), that had found a home in Bill W.'s library. After a couple of decades of successfully treating alcoholics, public controversy entered and diminished their effectiveness. The clergymen publicly quarreled with the physicians. Thus, the movement did not last much beyond the life and energy of its founder.

Our immediate ancestor, the Oxford Group, later renamed Moral Rearmament, has a similar story; it has initially impressive results through a proven method of personal spiritual transformation. Bill asserts in *AA Comes of Age*, that all of our spiritual principles come directly from the Oxford Group, and by way of Sam Shoemaker, its New York leader at Calvary Church, where Bill attended meetings with Ebby and Rowland H. The Oxford Group had the ability to fill vast arenas, like the Hollywood Bowl in 1939, where 25,000 filled the inside and another 10,000

waited outside. Yet, today there's little awareness of their immense influence outside of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Our own present guide, our “founding moment” to recovery from the illness of alcoholism, is thought by many of us to have begun with an encounter just before Armistice Day in 1934, between our co-founder Bill and a childhood friend, Ebby, a recent recruit in the Oxford Group. Bill and Lois were living in Brooklyn Heights. Ebby was sober—something Bill hadn't expected to see; he left Bill a description of a program of simple actions,⁵³ one designed to produce a spiritual awakening. Bill continued to drink for a few more weeks, but after his fourth admission to Towns Hospital on December 11, 1934, he experienced his “sudden and profound” spiritual event that changed him and the lives of alcoholics in this room. For he then, like Ebby, had caught fire and set about trying to ignite the same passion for sobriety that had been let loose in himself. It is said that Bill tried and failed with 40 men. He then ventured to Akron and tumbled into the lives of Dr. Bob and Ann. He was to stay with the Smiths for over three months, and together they carried the message with zeal to many others. When he left Dr. Bob's, there was one other on the road to recovery, Bill D., a lawyer. What was to become Alcoholics Anonymous had begun.

⁵³ In 1937, three years after Ebby's outreach to Bill, the program of simple actions from the alcoholics of the Oxford Movement, as reported by Earl T. of Chicago:

- 1) Complete deflation.
- 2) Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power.
- 3) Moral Inventory.
- 4) Confession.
- 5) Restitution.
- 6) Continued work with other alcoholics.

Alcoholics Anonymous Fourth Edition, p.263 “He Sold Himself Short”
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Thus, AA started on the Road of Happy Destiny. And, initially at least, our growth was slow. Most likely a good thing. It took almost four years to gather 100 members and publish a basic textbook. Like those movements before us, Bill was to observe in a talk in Memphis in September 1947, that success was a “serious problem.” He stated, “The wine of forgetfulness might make us dream that Alcoholics Anonymous was *our* success rather than *God’s* will...How, as a movement, shall we maintain our humility—and so our unity—in the face of what the world calls a great triumph? Perhaps we need not look far afield for an answer. We need only adapt and apply to our group life those principles upon which each of us has founded his own recovery. If humility can expel the obsessions to drink alcohol, then surely humility can be our antidote for that subtle wine called success.” (AA Grapevine, October 1947, p.8)

In August 1947, the previous month, it was reported that there were 48,613 members, in 1,650 groups, in 13 countries. Bill then set about the task of “assuring AA’s future” through the formulation of our Twelve Traditions. He knew that these were the Light for our future. Each of these principles has a reality in the records of our early years, and was deep in the documented experience of these earlier “successful” efforts to aid the alcoholic. Earlier movements failed not because they weren’t successful, but rather because they were; they demonstrated Bill’s point that success can be more damaging to a society than failure.

As in my own personal experience, failure gets my attention; success can make me “intoxicated.” When I lose, I may ask for help; if I hurt enough I might even take the advice. I find that I need the Twelve Steps in my life more than ever to assure my own emotional sobriety.

And our Fellowship needs the Twelve Traditions in our collective lives to assure Emotional Sobriety at the Group and Area levels. Although records on alcoholics are difficult to gather, it is estimated that there are now 2,000,000 members in approximately 89,000 groups in 146 countries.

So many of us in service throughout the AA world believe that a careful study of our history is essential—to deepen appreciation for our gifts and to foster a renewed effort to remember and carry forward our original message.

Archives, then, are about keeping our collective history and its struggle before us, stimulating a feeling of humility and trust in God’s guidance; taking the abstract wording of the Traditions and transforming them into vital tools for our survival. Keeping clear this window to our past can provide the best light for our future.

All service committees are concerned with carrying our message: by design, the trustees’ Archives Committee’s chief work is preserving our original message. For, as Carl Sandburg wrote, “Whenever a Society or Civilization perishes, there is always one condition present; they forgot where they came from.”