

From Chapters To Sections

The message of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous spread slowly across the United States in 1939. At that time, the largest groups holding meetings were located in New York and Ohio. The New York City, Akron, and Cleveland chapters were growing well enough in numbers for the meetings to relocate out of members' homes into more public meeting rooms: banquet halls, hotels, schools, community centers, churches, and rented clubrooms. Sporadic newspaper coverage, word-of-mouth, and the efforts of early members in "finding and fixing drunks" brought recovery to more than one hundred men and women.

The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published in April of that year, but inquiries to the small office of the Alcoholic Foundation ¹ in New York City were scarce. The first few hundred men and women, with the aid of the new Big Book, continued to apply their personal approaches to attracting active drunks toward recovery and AA sobriety. AAs primarily carried the message of Alcoholics Anonymous from one person to another, carefully building a membership in a society of ex-drunks with small numbers of repeated successes. The early AA pioneers established the local groups and chapters that, unpredictably and

¹ The Alcoholic Foundation, formed in May 1938 to meet in New York, consisted of three non-alcoholics and two alcoholics. Renamed in 1955 as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Alcoholic Foundation was the original Board of Trustees. Refer to *AA Comes of Age*, pages 14-16 and 151-157. The book is available from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (Catalog number B-3)

unknown to them, would soon handle a quicker pace of newcomers seeking sobriety.

In September 1939 *Liberty*, a five-cent weekly magazine with a nationwide distribution, published a feature article on Alcoholics Anonymous called “Alcoholics and God.” It referred to the new book and recommended its readers to “get hold of a copy. It may very well help you guide a sick man--an allergic alcoholic--on the way to health and contentment.”²

A linkage to the medical profession was achieved within months of the book’s first printing, through a published review of our Big Book by a nationally respected theologian and health writer, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick. Doctor referrals would bring more alcoholics into our young Fellowship.³

The Big Book was not an overnight best seller, but requests for help and all written inquiries received a personal answer from the staff at the Alcoholic Foundation office.

While the New York office initially called the existing groups of Alcoholics Anonymous in the different parts of the United States “chapters”, the message of recovery circulated, and additional small chapters formed. The Chicago chapter began holding meetings once a week at an Evanston, Illinois apartment in September of 1939, and a downtown Chicago meeting for AAs

² *Liberty* magazine, September 30, 1939, page 7.

³ Page 271 in the Big Book, Fourth Edition, describes the attraction of Sylvia K. of Evanston, Illinois to AA recovery through her doctor, in the story “The Keys to the Kingdom.” Also on page 265, Earl T., Chicago’s first AA member, describes the assistance of the same doctor in the story “He Sold Himself Short.” From *First 17 Members Who Sobered Up In The Chicago Area*, two pages. Source: Chicago Archives.

and their families was added in early October. This Open AA meeting, the Tuesday night “Big” meeting, grew in attendance.

Alcoholics Anonymous had come to Illinois.

Another magazine with an even larger circulation than *Liberty*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, published a feature article about AA in March 1941. The Jack Alexander piece “Alcoholics Anonymous” (available today in Conference-approved pamphlet form) quickened the pace of attraction to AA recovery. The Chicago Group, with its several newspapermen, impressed Alexander with its success and enthusiasm. When the *Post* printed the Alcoholic Foundation address, thousands of inquiries flooded the New York office, and its still small staff continued to personally answer each letter.

The Chicago chapter opened its Central Service Office in May 1941. It was the first Intergroup Central office anywhere in Alcoholics Anonymous, and assisted locally with the deluge of inquiries resulting from the *Post* article. During the spring of 1941, the Open Tuesday night “Big” meeting grew to over 250 persons attending each week and the home telephones of the Chicago Group “founders” were kept very busy. The Central Office, with its newly listed telephone number, met the growing requests for information and twelfth step calls.

Alcoholics Anonymous became an authentic national institution after the magazine coverage. Across the United States, AA membership grew from 2,000 to an estimated 8,000 members by the end of the year. The Chicago office answered many inquiries, led by the example of the New York “Headquarters” office in writing to and encouraging local AA members to call on the suffering alcoholics that wrote for help.

Personal response and encouragement continued from the small office of the Alcoholic Foundation. In one example of

thousands, a 1941 letter from Ruth Hock, the secretary at the New York office, was written to a woman in Springfield, Illinois, telling her of the nearest meetings in St. Louis, Missouri. It offered the woman encouragement and requested her continued correspondence.⁴

The Alcoholic Foundation office handled an enormous amount of mail and sold many copies of the Big Book following the 1941 *Post* article. Over the next eleven years, Jack Alexander wrote additional features about Alcoholics Anonymous for the magazine. The *Saturday Evening Post* articles on recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous sustained the watershed of attraction that the March 1941 issue brought to the young Fellowship.

The Chicago chapter found that its Central Office opening of 1941 would also help meet public information requests and outreach. The Chicago office, with the substantial efforts of its first secretary, Grace Cultice, provided great assistance to the Alcoholic Foundation office in carrying the AA message of recovery in AA's Midwest "section." It fielded many calls for general information, referred individuals to local hospitals for detox treatment, and sent out AA volunteers to call on people who requested help. The Central Office developed a set of ten city Districts within a short time, and established an organizational example that other central offices would follow. Meanwhile, each Tuesday night at the Central YMCA in downtown Chicago, the "Big" meeting continued to attract both the curious and the serious.

One small group of "regulars" attending the Chicago meeting returned to their homes in Whiteside County (on the Rock River and east of the Mississippi valley) each week. In 1943, there were enough members to form a local group, and meetings of Alcoholics

⁴ Letter located in the Northern Illinois Area Archives.

Anonymous began in the town of Sterling with a membership of three.

In northern Illinois, the Sterling Group is the earliest recorded group to meet outside Chicago. Today it continues to meet each Wednesday night.

The Alcoholic Foundation published United States Directories every six months during the 1940s. The 1941-1951 Directories also listed only the information provided to the Alcoholic Foundation: the number of members in each group, the group contribution amounts, a secretary or contact name, and a postal address (more often than telephone numbers). The Directory formats changed over time, removing contact addresses, adding Area Delegates and Area Chairman information, printing only once a year, and with the most recent change taking place in 1994, when yearly group contributions were no longer published. The Directories repeatedly state that the “information reflects that as provided to the General Service Office.” Each 1940s six-month printing was emphasized as “AA confidential.”

Mail correspondence to groups and group secretaries continued with reports of Alcoholic Foundation meetings, literature news, financial news, and items of interest. The first AA newsletter ⁵ was sent in late 1940 to all the chapters and groups in the different sections of the United States, and was written by Ruth Hock, Alcoholic Foundation Secretary. The *AA Bulletin* service news format later developed into the AA World Services newsletter *Box 4-5-9*. The *AA Grapevine* magazine, mixing news, artwork, letters, service, and recovery articles, followed in mid-1944.

⁵ *AA Bulletin #1*, November 14, 1940, two pages, located in the NIA Archives.

Beginning with the 1942 Directory, the Chicago chapter of groups listed an estimated 450 members, and was the only recorded site of AA meetings in Illinois. Each six-month listing of the chapters and groups showed a rapid growth of Alcoholics Anonymous in Illinois as well as across the United States.

From letters and reports sent to the Alcoholic Foundation office, the Chicago Group quickly grew in numbers:

Feb. 1940 with 33 members, April 1941 with 350 members, July 1941 with 430 members, and December 1941 with 450 members.⁶

An AA group's listing was usually published a few months after the start of its meetings. The first meetings in the northern section of Illinois announced the Sterling Group (begun in winter 1943) and the Rockford chapter. Both AA groups were included in the 1943 Directory's publishing date of June 1943.

A complete photocopy set of 1941-1951 semi-annual Directories, the *Listing of AA Groups with the Alcoholic Foundation*, specifically records Illinois group growth, and is located in the NIA Archives.

Across the United States in 1940: 59 groups, 1,400 members.

Listing of Illinois AA Groups With The Alcoholic Foundation

1943 _____

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Chicago (presently Area 19), P.O. Box 1047, 600 members.
Rockford, secretary listed, 4 members.

⁶ From Chicago AA letters and reports on file at the GSO Archives.

⁷ Information provided by District 41 Archives.

Sterling, secretary listed, 3 members.
Peoria (presently in Area 21), P.O. Box 26, 17 members.
1944_____

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Peoria, with two groups, 23 members.
Springfield (presently in Area 21), P.O. Box 883,
25 members.
Villa Park, Brandywine Group, the first meeting in
DuPage county.⁷

Listing of AA Groups With The Alcoholic Foundation

1945_____

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Chicago, with 1,250 members.
Peoria, with 40 members.
Rockford, with 12 members.
Sterling, with 4 members.

Note: Telephone numbers were first listed for each 1945 contact.
Across the United States in 1945: 556 groups, 12,986 members.

1946_____

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Fox River Valley Groups, secretaries listed.
Aurora, 20 members.
Crystal Lake, 25 members.
Elgin, 25 members.
Peoria, three groups, 64 members.
Rockford, 20 members.

⁷ Information provided by District 41 Archives.

Waukegan, Group B, P.O. Box 624, 25 members.

1947 _____

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Aurora, P.O. Box 654, 25 members.

Chicago, 2,800 members.

Elmhurst, Group 15-C, 30 members.⁷

Glen Ellyn, Glenbard Group, 20 members.⁷

Listing of AA Groups With The Alcoholic Foundation

1947

(continued) _____

St. Charles, Firehouse Group, P.O. Box 469, 17 members.

Springfield, 65 members.

Villa Park, 20 members.⁷

Note: Group registration numbers were first used in 1947.

1948 _____

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Aurora, 50 members.

Barrington (Fox River Valley Groups), secretary listed,
12 members.

Batavia (Fox River Valley Groups), P.O. Box 267, 8 members.

Fox Valley Groups, all 5 meetings, 75 members.

Freeport, 5 members.

Joliet, Steel City Group, P.O. Box 1102, 15 members.

⁷ Information provided by District 41 Archives.

Moline, P.O. Box 311, 13 members.
Mt. Morris/ Oregon, Ridge Runners Group, P.O. Box 144,
8 members.
Ottawa, P.O. Box 657, 13 members.
Rockford, P.O. Box 183, 35 members.
Rock Island, P.O. Box 219, 40 members.
Sterling, P.O. Box 15, 12 members.
Wauconda, later called the Burton's Bridge Group.⁸
Woodstock, secretary listed, 8 members.

Listing of AA Groups With The Alcoholic Foundation

1949 _____

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Barrington, P.O. Box 221, 17 members.
DeKalb, secretary listed, 5 members.
Freeport, the 48 Club Group, P.O. Box 377, 12 members.
Galesburg, secretary listed, 21 members.
Kankakee, Valley Group, secretary listed, 5 members.
McHenry, P.O. Box 216, 5 members.
Sterling, 15 members.
Waukegan, Group A, secretary listed, 28 members.

1950 _____

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⁸ Information provided by District 11 Archives.

Batavia, two groups: Depot Group, P.O. Box 267, and the
Batavia Group, secretary listed.
Cary, P.O. Box 207, 7 members.
Chicago, 4,300 members.
Dixon, P.O. Box 59, 16 members.
Elgin, two groups: Group #1, secretary listed, and the
Alano Club of the Fox Valley, P.O. Box 272, 17 members.
Freeport, the 48 Club Group, 11 members.
Kankakee, 12 members.
Mt. Morris, Ridge Runners Group, 18 members.
Ottawa, 25 members.
Rockford, three groups, all P.O. Box 183:
1) Central Group, Alano Club of Rockford, 70 members.
2) Blackhawk Group, 25 members.
3) West Side Group, 15 members.
Round Lake, P.O. Box 245, 14 members.

Across the United States in 1950: 6,249 groups, 96,475 members.

1950 was a significant milestone year for Alcoholics Anonymous. The first AA International Convention was held in July at Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Bob S., whose cancer would take his life a few months later, gave a brief and memorable address to the 3,000 persons attending the Convention. He and Bill W. shared the podium for the last time on Sunday, July 30.⁹

The 1950 Convention unanimously endorsed AA's Twelve Traditions. Earl T., Chicago AA's first member, worked closely with Bill W. to create and develop the "short form" of our Second Legacy, and both versions were presented at Cleveland. The

⁹ "Voices of Our Co-Founders" audiocassette, available from the General Service Office Archives, 475 Riverside Drive, New York NY 10115.

1946 issues of the *AA Grapevine* published the complete “long form” as written by Bill W., and the Traditions were generally understood and accepted by the Fellowship long before 1950. Bill later wrote that a highlight of the First International was “the confirmation of our Twelve Traditions by the Convention as the permanent platform of unity on which our Fellowship would henceforth stand.”¹⁰

The proposed General Service Conference was brought for open discussion to AA groups in 1950. The proposal tested the idea that the development of a World Service Conference would provide linkage between the Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation and elected representatives from the AA sections of the United States and Canada. The Trustees at “Headquarters,” four non-alcoholics and three AA members, gave their support for the Conference idea early that year, after numerous presentations from Bill during the preceding four years. Until then, the Alcoholic Foundation Trustees had sole authority over the world service functions of the Fellowship.

Bill’s concern was wisely steered by the growing consensus of the groups that a direct access to our service affairs was needed. His last, late summer 1950 meeting with Dr. Bob produced their agreement to call the Conference. For the good of AA as a whole, their agreement and recommendation ultimately made certain that AA members could share the responsibility for world services with the alcoholic and non-alcoholic Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation (renamed the General Service Board in 1955).

The 96,475 estimated AA membership of 1950 would have a voice and a vote in the five-year trial run of a General Service Conference. The AA groups of 1951, including those in Northern

¹⁰ *AA Comes of Age*, 1957, Chapter II “The Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous” p. 213, reprinted with permission of AA World Services, Inc.

Illinois, certainly were active participants in reaching a consensus of “yes.”

1951 NIA groups are listed in Appendix II on page 91. Comparisons with 1940s years of growth, reporting, and registration can be made with the alphabetical listings.

Also included for Illinois in the 1951 Directory:

Chicago (Area 19), 123 W. Madison Street, was listed with 4,900 members. Group names, contacts, or meeting locations were not shared with AAWS Directories until 1952.¹¹

The Chicago Area Service Office uses the same telephone number today (with area code 312) and many longtime AA members recall dialing Financial 6-1475. Having outgrown its sites in the Loop, the Tuesday Night “Big” Meeting was decentralized, and the Opens were held in four Chicago locations every Tuesday beginning in 1950.¹²

Once each year, Chicago celebrates its September 1939 beginnings with the All Chicago Open, drawing an estimated 12,000 persons in the 1990s.

Peoria (presently Area 21) listed two groups with different P.O. Box numbers, and 90 members.

Springfield (presently Area 21) grew from the efforts of one sober member in 1941. Ward M. was an AA Loner for two years, much like Earl T. in Chicago. Springfield meetings began in 1943 and soon supported a clubhouse for regular closed AA

¹¹ November 1955 telegrams and letters between GSO and the Chicago Central Office. Source: GSO Archives.

¹² *Chicago AA Landmarks 1937-1959*, two pages. Source: Chicago Area Archives.

meetings. In 1951, Springfield listed three groups, two P.O. Box numbers, and 150 members.¹³

Post Office Box addresses were the primary source for contacting Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1940s. Most groups held meetings once per week, and after group finances became stronger, some opted for small announcements in local newspapers.

Letters requesting help were written directly to the P.O.

Boxes when they were available to the general public. Many times, the spouses of active drunks would be the initial writers, and one or two group members would follow through in person on each letter. The correspondence from the Alcoholic Foundation kept abreast of these same P.O. Box numbers for passing on information, referrals, literature, and donation receipts from the New York office. There were no membership surveys¹⁴ to describe the makeup of groups, and group secretaries reported only membership totals. In the 1940s Directories, the reader can view the steady memberships of certain groups as well as the rapid growth of others.

The P.O. Boxes preceded the local AA answering services of today. However, from its beginning in 1941, the Chicago Central Office employed its telephone number for large amounts of Twelfth Step calls. Both the Chicago and New York offices, as well as AA members, used the few telephone numbers of group

¹³ *History of AA in Springfield, Illinois*, 1979, four pages. Source: Southern Illinois Area Archives, with copies located in NIA Archives.

¹⁴ The first general AA Membership Survey began in 1970 through the effort of General Service Board Chairman Dr. Jack Norris and the General Service Conference.

secretaries in the Directories. If there was no telephone contact, the Post Office Box addresses received letter requests for help.

Returning to the record of the earliest groups in northern Illinois, the histories of the first correspondence with DeKalb, the Sterling Group, the Rockford chapter, and the Freeport chapter reflect distinct ways that many groups and AA chapters began.

DeKalb

In April of 1940 a letter arrived at the office of the Alcoholic Foundation in New York City: “My story doesn’t differ in details from thousands of others, so I’m not going to write the details... Alcoholics Anonymous is new to me, and I’m interested to make contacts in this vicinity that I may become a member in good standing.” Perrie S., a local pharmacist, wrote that he “read ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ thoroughly and wished to say, that I established myself with a Superior Being by myself, with my own thoughts, during a 28 day leave from business with persons who at that time were in the same fix as myself.”

Ruth Hock, the Alcoholic Foundation Office secretary, replied within a few days and thanked him for his very sincere letter. She referred him to Earl T. “and the Chicago membership, and we assure you they will appreciate an opportunity to talk with you.” The Chicago Group was the nearest AA chapter sixty-five miles east of DeKalb, and Perrie rode the trains into the city many times to attend its meetings. He and Ruth exchanged letters on a regular basis over the next few years. Ruth, in different letters from the New York office, suggested that he contact other new members in nearby Dixon, Sterling, and Rockford. The Central

Office in Chicago also wrote him with requests from prospects as far west as Galesburg and Geneseo (currently in NIA District 91).

Perrie S., the AA Loner in DeKalb, remains the earliest northern Illinois correspondent of record in the Archives at the General Service Office in New York City.¹⁵ His story after 1943 is unknown, but DeKalb's first AA group registered five members with the Alcoholic Foundation in 1949.

The Sterling Group

The secretary and "founder" of the Sterling Group, Ken S., got sober in Chicago in 1940 and moved to Sterling, a Whiteside County steel mill town in northwestern Illinois and 75 miles east of the Mississippi River and the Quad Cities.

For three years, he traveled the distance between Sterling and Chicago to attend meetings on a regular basis, had the opportunity to place new prospects in Chicago hospitals for detox treatment, and brought other alcoholics he found in the Sterling area to Chicago meetings.

The Wednesday night meetings of the Sterling Group began in Ken S.'s home in 1943. Coffee, cake, and light games of cards usually followed the AA meeting, and families were included on many occasions. No regular collection was taken but individual members contributed to the group when needed. The number of members reported to the New York office in winter 1943 was three. These three AA members welcomed other recovering alcoholics from the towns of Tampico, Harmon, Mt. Morris, Morrison, Dixon, and Polo. An early member, Ray N. of Sterling,

¹⁵ Courtesy of GSO Archives and 2002 research access to personal correspondence files. The excerpted letters remain at the AA Archives at GSO in New York City.

recalled that growth at the Sterling Group also branched off into new groups in Dixon, Clinton (Iowa), Kewanee and Mt. Morris.¹⁶

Another member rented Post Office Box 15 in Rock Falls for the Sterling Group in 1948, when the group had grown to twelve regular members.¹⁷

In a letter from Ken S. to the Chicago Central Office in July 1947, sent to its secretary to update contact addresses and group membership numbers, he wrote: "As to 'losing interest' in AA after being given almost seven years of sobriety---that is something I cannot picture."¹⁸

The members of Alcoholics Anonymous in Northern Illinois Area can consider Ken S. of Sterling as our earliest sober member and effective AA group servant. His example begins with selflessly carrying the message of AA recovery to others and encouraging the start of new groups. His early service, maintaining the Sterling Group's linkage with the rest of AA as a whole, contributed a large amount to the growth of Alcoholics Anonymous in northwestern Illinois. All available records show that the Sterling Group start, in the winter of 1943, remains the first registered AA group within the current borders of NIA.

Rockford

¹⁶1982 recollection letter. The history of the Sterling Group was placed in the NIA Archives from 1995 research for the NIA History project, through the response of the District 73 Archivist.

¹⁷*The Listing of AA Groups with the Alcoholic Foundation*, February 1948 entry.

¹⁸Letter of July 17, 1947. Sterling Group history, located in the NIA Archives.

The beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous in the city of Rockford followed a repeated pattern of rapid growth experienced by many 1940 urban chapters. Starting with four members in 1943, Rockford's AA membership grew to over eighty by 1951.

Letters requesting help arrived at the Alcoholic Foundation in 1942, written by Rockford "founder" Ray E. and his wife, Arlene. He had found an article about Alcoholics Anonymous in a *Liberty* magazine issue, and unlike the first press coverage the magazine gave the Fellowship in 1939 the issue printed the address of the New York office.

The letter reply gave Ray the name and nearest location of an AA group in Chicago, where he began to attend meetings and found a sponsor. At that time, new "prospects" who came into Alcoholics Anonymous were directed to closed beginner's meetings for their first three months, and were then encouraged to attend the neighborhood Chicago home group meetings on Thursdays. Ray and Arlene also traveled by train to attend many open AA Tuesday night "Big" meetings.

Ray's sponsor, Charlie R., was employed as a mailman on a train line that ran from Chicago to Dubuque, Iowa. He stayed overnight in Rockford many times during freight runs, where the opportunity to carry the AA message of recovery was good. Both men remained sober, Ray's family life improved greatly, and Charlie ("Randy") later moved to Rockford from Chicago. Ray was listed as the Rockford chapter's secretary and contact in the Alcoholic Foundation Directories from 1943 through 1947, and he greatly assisted in the growth of Rockford AA groups.

Another "prospect" Bob M. was introduced to Ray in late 1942 by the Rockford Salvation Army, and Ray and Arlene took him into their home. As the result of a life filled with hardship, alcohol, and jail time, Bob's only possessions were a sweater full of holes and one crutch (he had one leg). Ray became his AA

sponsor, and Bob became the Rockford chapter's secretary and contact in 1947, eventually getting married to another AA member in Ray's home.

Meetings first began in Ray and Arlene's home and soon branched out into two Rockford hotels, the administration building of a local housing project, and other members' homes. On Wednesday nights, an Open meeting was held in one of the hotels, and members and their families attended from both the east and west sides of the city. Small AA social gatherings were held every Saturday night at the Rockford Labor Temple.

In the recollection of Gordy C., 1940s Rockford meetings and Saturday night Socials were well attended by both men and women, but women usually got together on one side of the room while men stayed on the other. In an amusing anecdote, Gordy recalled, "someone came in one time and wanted to know if it was a Quaker meeting."¹⁹

Freeport

Both Rockford groups and Dubuque, Iowa groups participated in the spring of 1948 to establish a new AA group in Freeport. A local physician and a priest placed an ad in the Freeport Journal-Standard, announcing the formation of a Freeport area AA Group to serve the community of Freeport and Stephenson County, and its first meeting was held May 19, 1948 at the Freeport Hotel. The interest of two civic-minded citizens and the support of the groups in neighboring cities contributed to the new group's success.

Growth was slow at first and the Freeport Group began meeting in member's homes in 1949, but newspaper ads continued to invite inquiries. New members brought the need for larger

¹⁹Information provided by the Rockford Area Intergroup Archives in NIA District 70.

meeting places, and after several months at the YMCA, the group moved to a business district location in 1950 and opened a clubroom, taking its name as the 48 Club Group. The original 15 to 20 members maintained the rooms, and the 48 Club Group added several new weekly meetings on its second move to another business district site in 1967. Growing to between 55 to 60 members, the 48 Club Group moved again to larger quarters on North Cherry Street in downtown Freeport in 1976.

Other A.A groups not affiliated with the 48 Club Group grew in the Stephenson County area at the same time the club continued its growth. Sojourn House, a county detox center and halfway house founded in 1974, continues to receive the outreach and dedicated assistance of local AA members.²⁰

Moline and Rock Island

Southwest of Sterling, the Quad Cities welcomed the AA message of recovery in 1945. The Davenport, Iowa chapter “was soon joined by interested problem drinkers from Moline and Rock Island. In about 1948, small groups started meetings at the LeClaire Hotel in Moline and then at the Fort Armstrong Hotel in Rock Island... The Rock Island Group held meetings at their Fort Armstrong location from 1949 until 1972.”²¹

The growth across the Mississippi River reflects the New York Office’s description of the “AA chapter” where one set of groups branched out into neighboring towns. The groups of Moline

²⁰ Information published in the 1970-1971 *Stephenson County History Book*, written by Henry S. of Freeport with his appended text of 1977. Courtesy of District 72 Archives.

²¹ “Then and Now” from a 1992 issue of the *ILLOWA Messenger*, the newsletter of the Quad Cities Intergroup in Moline. From GSO research by the NIA Historian, the 1948 start is a correction from the 1949 date in the article.

and Rock Island participate in NIA District 90 today, but many share an original linkage with Alcoholics Anonymous in Iowa.

The records of new 1940s and 1950s groups, formed through the Sterling, Rockford, Freeport, and Quad Cities growth and outreach, additionally show that the AA message traveled in many directions from the Mississippi River border to the outlying sections of northwestern Illinois.

Fox River Valley

The “Fox River Valley Groups” 1946 listing with the Alcoholic Foundation came from their initial linkage with Chicago AA, grouped into a section by the Chicago Central Office. The “sectioning” of the 1940s’ meetings in Aurora, St., Charles, Batavia, Elgin, Crystal Lake, and Barrington began as an aid for geographic location, and the section retained its Chicago listing from 1950 until the late 1980s as District 10, the “Northwest Suburban Districts”.

Confusingly but an historical fact, the towns in the section considered as District 10 groups were also identified as different Districts in the 1960 map drawn by the Downstate Illinois AA Conference (see page 36). Some groups in the same counties kept their registration active with Chicago AA, while others aligned with the Downstate Areas. One surviving remnant of the District 10 designation is found in the name of NIA District 22 (Elgin and northern Kane County)’s checking account: N.W.S.AAS.G., the “Northwest Suburban Alcoholics Anonymous Service Groups.” Following at least a half dozen District changes through 1997, the successive Districts formed out of the original Fox Valley section continue their representation in Area 20.²²

²²Information found in records and Minutes located in the AA Archives of both NIA and the Chicago Area.

The Group Secretaries

Each group's secretary provided service to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in the initial effort to establish contact and correspondence with the Alcoholic Foundation. Individual correspondence and letters described activities, problems, and successes with the group members reporting the 1940s' group voice. The service structure at the group level remained very loosely organized and was basically undefined. Whether elected, approved, or volunteered, the secretaries were the groups' first trusted servants. In the northern section of Illinois, the Directory listings of AA contacts for chapters and groups established a network for communication with other group secretaries, the office of the Alcoholic Foundation in New York, and the Central Service Office in Chicago.

The correspondence remained mutual. The linkage between groups and an AA "Headquarters" was strengthened when many groups established P.O. boxes and began printing announcements of meetings in local newspapers. As group membership increased, the opportunity for AA service expanded. Group secretaries kept the records while service positions developed for a group's treasurer, chairperson, greeters, and by the 1950s', the Group Representative (today's General Service Representative).

A Greater Sense of the Fellowship's General Service

1940s AA members from different groups gathered informally and discussed current news, compared outreach strategies, and most always found a common ground. Group Secretaries served by reporting the group voice to the New York "Headquarters" and relaying back the office's news. The *AA Grapevine* acceptance

by the Groups, from its beginning in 1944, considered its success as a result of the group “sense” of participating in Alcoholics Anonymous.

The 1946 AA *Grapevine* articles on the Twelve Traditions provided a climate for active group discussions. Establishing too many rules and requirements would limit the growth of our young Fellowship, and the “Twelve Points to Assure Our Future” wisely focused on the AA membership experience as the result of ideas that worked well. The suggestions about membership, decision-making, non-affiliation, non-professionalism, the dangers of publicity, the need to rely on member contributions only, and the highlight of spiritual principles overriding any one member’s personality all proved to explain “how and why” the Fellowship could survive.

The AA groups gradually endorsed and adopted the Traditions as the Fellowship’s working expression of unity. Where the AA Twelve Steps placed many drunks in recovery, the AA Twelve Traditions brought the groups out of their separated existence into a larger community that bridged all borders.