

The Downstate Conference and Illinois Growth, Toward NIA Autonomy 1951-1972

The three Illinois Areas were sectioned for the election of Delegates to the General Service Conference in late 1950, as Bill set upon his whirlwind tour before the first Conference of April 1951. Over the next twenty-three years, the Northern and Southern Areas' elected representatives met at Assemblies identified as the Downstate Illinois AA Conference. The combined sessions elected Delegates each year, to serve two-year terms for either the Northern or Southern section at the General Service Conferences.

Our neighboring Chicago Area soon experienced trouble of its own creation and split into factional strife. In 1954, two newly formed service entities, the West Suburban Intergroup and the South Suburban Intergroup, abandoned the Metropolitan Area Rotating Committee (the Chicago Area Assembly). Metropolitan Chicago AA's Policy Committee failed to search for a group consensus on a number of items, beginning with the paid employment of Earl T. as "Service Coordinator".³⁰ Earl, Chicago AA's founding member, was well known and very well respected, but the groups were not fully consulted about the plan and were not notified about their opportunity to vote with substantial unanimity.

For eighteen years, Chicago's three service groups worked separately and came to few agreements. A Downstate Illinois meeting of 1959 tabled discussion on the situation in Chicago and chose not to become involved. The Downstate Illinois Conference wisely would not be drawn into this conflict, considering it an outside issue of controversy and autonomy.

³⁰ *Chicago Metropolitan Policy Committee Report to Chicago Area Groups*, 1954. Three pages, including a letter from Bill W.

Source: Chicago Area Archives.

Progressing and growing, the Northern and Southern Areas cooperated and stood together. Unity developed in “Downstate AA” while it remained tolerant of its geographic differences. The splintered unity of the Chicago Area eventually led to the 1963 General Service Conference refusal to seat either of two Delegates elected by Chicago groups that year. Despite its difficulties, the entire Chicago Area 19, with its three service entities, also shared in the continued growth of Alcoholics Anonymous in Illinois.

The Minutes and records of the Downstate Illinois AA Conference are located in the Northern Illinois Archives by the contribution of a very special woman. A member of AA, she was the widow of early AA member Ed C. (Panel 13 Delegate for Southern Illinois Area 21, 1963-64). The past Downstate AA Conference Secretary, Loie C. kept an entire set of Minutes from the Downstate AA proceedings. The collection spans the years 1954 through 1973 when she served in the elected position as Conference Secretary. Her reporting on the Planning Meetings (presently known in NIA as the Area Committee Meetings) and the Conferences (presently known as the Area Assemblies) kept the membership accurately informed for nineteen years.

A 1988 audiocassette tape is located in the NIA Archives, from Loie’s interview with past Delegate Hank G., then serving as NIA Archives Committee Chairman. The interview records her recollection of early Illinois AA service history. That year, accepted by NIA Archives with grateful appreciation for an unequalled gift, she turned over one set of Minutes and records to NIA.

Our past service history has been preserved with the help of this gracious past trusted servant’s donation of early Minutes. Highlights of Downstate AA Conferences/ Assemblies complete this chapter.