

1972 - 1973: New Unity and Achieved Autonomy

The Downstate Illinois Assembly, officially known as the Illinois State AA Conference, held its last combined-Area election for the Northern Illinois Delegate on September 26, 1971. The Assembly also discussed an important motion made to the State Steering Committee and presented it to the State Conference for a decision. Thirty-nine eligible voters (elected representatives from the Chicago, Northern, and Southern sections) carried this motion for approval: to adopt and establish a separate Assembly for the Northern Illinois Area. The approval gave the NIA Assembly its own choice and responsibility to select its next Delegate in 1973. NIA would return to the 1974 State AA Conference Assembly with its 1974-75 Delegate already elected.

The Downstate Assembly elected Lou D. of Glen Ellyn as its NIA Delegate for the 1972-73 service term. Following a lengthy discussion, a motion was made to establish and nominate a Coordinator, a new State Committee post that would report the “activities throughout the State (and) boundary states, to avoid dates of conflict.” NIA’s enthusiastic Delegate-elect volunteered to serve in the position and the motion was withdrawn.

The Amicable Split

Northern and Southern Areas’ quarterly Assemblies actively discussed the dissolution of the State Conference/Assembly structure over the next two years. Minutes of a Southern Illinois Quarterly Meeting (Assembly) in December of 1972 reported “the Northern Area was making decisions on their own, paying their own Delegate’s costs to the General Service Conference, and...

was assuming their own expenses.”³³ Southern Illinois Area began managing its own expenses in February 1972, and like NIA, established its separate Treasury. The Southern Illinois Treasurer reported a balance of \$218.39 at its June Assembly, and the NIA Treasurer reported a similar amount at the 1972 NIA Summer Assembly held at the Yorktown Shopping Center in Lombard.

The Downstate Illinois AA State Conference held its last Assembly at Bradley University in Peoria on August 18, 1973.

Downstate AA Minutes describe the division of the Areas (in a very real sense NIA was now an autonomous group) as amicable. Discussion at each 1970s’ Downstate AA meeting revolved around each Area’s challenge of parting company and functioning apart from one another. The State AA Conference Chairpersons first reported the possibility of an early end to their service terms at the August 1972 State AA Conference (Assembly) held at Bradley University in Peoria.

Considerable discussion continued at that 1972 Assembly when past NIA Delegate Bruce W. formally proposed the division into two autonomous Areas. Bruce’s proposal brought progress and discussion toward the pending split. He also requested that the groups consider doing away with the State AA Committee and the single State AA Treasury, and he honestly stated the fact that each Area had its separate voting entity and was responsible only to its own constituents. Bruce moderated the final Assembly discussion and vote on dissolving the State AA service structure in 1973.

Bruce W. (Panel 14 Area 20) remained active in AA service long after his term at the General Service Conference. He served on AA’s General Service Board as our first East Central Region

³³*Southern Area Quarterly Meeting Minutes*, Marion, Illinois, December 3, 1972. Loie C., Secretary. Source: NIA Archives.

Trustee from NIA, elected at the 1974 General Service Conference.

An All-Illinois State Conference

The 1972 Downstate Illinois Assembly approved a motion that two representatives, each from Chicago Area 19, Northern Illinois Area 20, and Southern Illinois Area 21 would serve on the AA State Conference Committee.³⁴ In this last action before disbanding, the Downstate Assembly created a new cooperation between all three Illinois Areas for the single purpose of planning and putting on future, annual AA State Conferences without a service Assembly.

Each of the three Illinois Delegate Areas currently sends its two representatives, the Delegates and Area Chairs, to the AA State Conference Policy Committee. Each year since 1974 and in rotation, the host Area assigns and divides participation for the Alcahion Meeting Chairpersons and Panel Presentation speakers between the other two Areas. The annual Illinois State AA Conference weekends emphasize AA service, but after disbanding the Downstate Illinois Areas' Steering Committee in 1973, no Illinois AA State Conference has called for any statewide, combined-Area vote on inter-Area service issues or General Service Conference items.

The Downstate Illinois AA Conference, its Committee structure, and its combined Northern and Southern Illinois Assemblies, came to an official end in September 1973, after both the Southern and Northern Areas accepted the August 18 resolution to disband. Before its closing, the Conference/Assembly heartily thanked and recognized the leadership efforts of the State

³⁴ *Southern Area Quarterly Meeting Minutes*, Marion, Illinois, December 3, 1972. Loie C., Secretary. Source: NIA Archives.

Committee's trusted servants: State Chairman Dick L. (Southern Illinois Area Panel 19 Delegate 1969-70), State Secretary Loie C. (from Southern Illinois, with nineteen years of service), and State Treasurer Lee H. (Northern Illinois Panel 10 Delegate 1960-61).

Chicago Area Integration

Dissolving the Downstate Illinois Assembly service structure was not the only developing event in Illinois AA that was set in motion at the beginning of 1972. In Chicago, a Combined Services Committee (often remembered as the Common Purpose Committee) began discussion on restoring unity in the Chicago Area. Representatives of its three service groups, the Chicago Metropolitan Rotating Committee, the West Suburban Intergroup, and the South Suburban Intergroup met together to restore the unity splintered in 1954. The "common purpose" established a new cooperation and determined the exact location for Chicago Area Groups and Districts. South Suburban groups chose to remain with NIA, and many West Suburban groups reunited with the Chicago Metropolitan Rotating Committee.

The boundaries of Chicago Area 19 and Northern Illinois Area, shown on the 1972 Northern Illinois map on page 36, were clearly defined for the first time in many years. NIA District 3 included some groups that were once a part of the West Suburban Intergroup, and District 5 contained the former South Suburban Intergroup member groups. Various groups in Districts 1 and 2 came into NIA from their previous alignment with the Chicago Area 19 Rotating Committee.

NIA's first Secretary, Karen T., corresponded with many groups and answered questions on which Area the groups belonged. She also helped resolve specific questions for each

suburban group on where its GSRs could participate in District AA service. Following her two-year term in NIA, Karen returned to service with Chicago AA.

Through this great 1972 effort involving both the NIA Secretary and Chicago's "Common Purpose" Committee, groups were linked to existing Districts in either Chicago Area 19 or Northern Illinois Area 20. The return of suburban groups to Chicago Area 19 ended the three separate service entities formed in 1954.

A new Chicago Area unity resulted from the Combined Services Committee's effort to redistrict Area 19. The West Suburban Intergroup voted to dissolve in October 1972³⁵ and most of its groups joined the newly named Chicago Area Service Committee (CASC, formerly the Chicago Metropolitan Rotating Committee). Years later in 2001, the CASC changed its name to CASA (the Chicago Area Service Assembly).

Illinois Alcoholics Anonymous' 1972 fellowship witnessed unity restored to Chicago after eighteen years of division and strife, while AA unity continued to grow for its newly autonomous neighbor, our own Northern Illinois Area 20.

Elusive Records

There are no NIA Assembly or Committee Meeting Minutes for either 1972 or 1973, but the search effort continues through the NIA Archives. Before NIA established its Archives, sets of Minutes were kept by Area Secretaries. The Minutes were lost in 1975—an Area Secretary got married and moved, and her family

³⁵ From the presentation and discussion printed in a Chicago-Suburban Intergroup Council flyer, September 1972 "Proposal to dissolve," page 2. Source: Chicago Area Archives

discarded all her papers! Details of the first two years of Northern Illinois Area meetings can only be provided by recollection.

The Montgomery Ward store at Yorktown had a meeting room that was large enough for a new AA Area Assembly. Karen T., NIA Secretary, recalled that the participation of more than forty Northern Illinois Area AA representatives was a very encouraging sign of the 1972 commitment to service in Alcoholics Anonymous. She noted that the new NIA participation exceeded the total attendance numbers of many previously combined-Area Downstate Assemblies.

Early NIA Secretaries also recall that Lou D. from Glen Ellyn District 4, the Panel 22 NIA Delegate to the 1972-73 General Service Conference, helped organize Traditions Panels for NIA Assemblies when morning sessions were held for the benefit of GSR participation. Southern Illinois Area began this practice in early 1971, and the NIA Assemblies duplicated its success. Lou, Delegate, Rollie C., the immediate past Delegate from Rockford, and Bruce W., past Delegate from Waukegan, led Area 20 through the first growth of its autonomy. Lou is also fondly recalled as being well versed in the *AA Service Manual*--he vigorously and very often advocated its study by all AA members.

Lou suffered a heart attack during the August 1973 Illinois State AA Conference weekend, and fortunately was able to drive himself to a local hospital. He completed his Delegate term, was later elected to serve as NIA Treasurer in 1980-81, and through his effort Area 20 obtained its first sales tax-exempt status with the State of Illinois in 1981.

A Larger Region

The member Areas of the AA East Central Region added the two Delegate Areas of Wisconsin in 1972, following Wisconsin's 1972 General Service Conference-approved request to separate

from the West Central Region. Wisconsin joined the AA Areas of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio (then including many groups from northern Kentucky). Our Regional Trustee to the General Service Board is selected from one of these fourteen Areas and serves the Fellowship for four years.

At the time of the Wisconsin addition, Jack M. (Panel 6 Delegate 1956-57 from Western Michigan Area 34) served as East Central Region Trustee for a term of three years. NIA past Delegate Bruce W. (Panel 14 Delegate 1964-65 from Waukegan) followed in 1974 to also serve three years.

The East Central Region agreed, with other Regions, to a three-year service term compromise that restored an overlap of all Trustee terms on the General Service Board. The one-time change was approved at the 1971 General Service Conference. When the Conference established AA Regions in 1963 and added two Canadian Regions in 1966, the General Service Board would have experienced a one-time rotation of all Regional Trustees in 1975.

Jack M. served the larger East Central Region during the first years of NIA and SIA autonomy. He developed the consensus for our Region to hold two new Conference weekends each year. Reporting on an example found in the Southeast AA Region, Jack proposed the Delegate/Past Delegate Conference in 1973. The fourteen Areas enthusiastically accepted his proposal, and Chicago Area 19's Panel 23 Delegate hosted the first Delegates' Luncheon in his hometown of Evanston. Within a few years, the Delegates' Luncheon changed in length to the current three-day Delegate/Past Delegate Conference, intended to benefit new Delegates and encourage fellowship among Regional servants.

The members of the East Central Region committee include all current and past Delegates of our fourteen Areas. The Regional Trustees serve as Co-Chair for the four years of their term on the General Service Board, and all other elected positions serve in

two-year terms. Our past Area 20 Delegates have served as Trustees (Panel 14 Bruce W. and Panel 34 Jack O.), Co-Chairs (Panel 38 Dennis D. and Panel 44 Russ V.), Treasurers (Panel 42 Tom B.), and Historian (Panel 36 Hank G., maintaining the ECR Archives). NIA last hosted the Delegate/Past Delegate Conference in February 1999 in Morris. At the Delegate/Past Delegate Conferences, open to all AAs, new East Central Region Delegates have the opportunity to read their Area Highlights report that is heard at their first General Service Conference, and a “mock” Conference floor session is held during the weekend.

The 1973 Delegates’ Luncheon in Evanston also approved an idea for an East Central Regional Conference. Southeast Michigan Area 33 committed to host the first East Central Regional Conference weekend, combining it with the 1973 Michigan AA State Conference. From the success of 1973, the East Central Region holds joint Regional Conferences with different State Conferences weekends each year, rotating the hosts between the Region’s fourteen Areas. The members of the Regional Committee usually hold a Delegate’s Breakfast during the weekend Regional Conference that is open to all AAs. Many times a Regional Committee Meeting takes place, also open to all AAs. The practice of the Delegate/Past Delegate Conference is upheld in the meetings, where only Delegates have a voice and vote—any AA who is not a Delegate can speak to the Meeting only when requested.

The two East Central Region events, the Delegates Conferences and the Regional Conferences, foster a greater sense of an interstate community and neighborliness. Over the years through today, participants find that the Fellowship is “much the

same in the Great White North as it is on the banks of the Ohio River.”³⁶

Appendix II lists the census of registered Area 20 groups as published in the AAWS 1973 Eastern United States Directory. This last appendix set on page 119 further tracks the growth in our newly autonomous NIA.

³⁶ May 1989 update to *The History of the East Central Region*, 1987, page 3. Source: NIA Archives.