

## A Class A Trustee Whose Research and Writing Focused on Alcoholism and the A.A. Fellowship

Milton A. Maxwell, who served as a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and then chairman of the General Service Board, traced his interest in A.A. to his time as a minister when he was approached by a congregant seeking help for a drinking problem.

Years later, he wrote: “Little did I realize in 1939 when, as Leslie S.’s minister, I suggested Alcoholics Anonymous to him, that in 1947 I would be a sociologist doing a Ph.D dissertation on A.A. But such was the case, and the result is a deep interest in the problem of alcoholism and particularly in A.A.”

The title of that dissertation is “Social Factors in the Alcoholics Anonymous Program.” Maxwell was a sociology professor at Washington State University when he was awarded his Ph.D in 1949.

In his dissertation abstract, Maxwell analyses the power of the A.A. group: “changed social relations are the most effective means for bringing about personality change—and that the social interaction in a primary group has the greatest capacity for bringing about such change.”

He wrote or co-wrote 20 articles on the sociological aspects of alcoholism during his tenure at WSU from 1947 to 1965, and nine while a professor at Rutgers University from 1965 to 1975.

In 1984, he published a full-length book, *The AA Experience*, intended for professionals.

Maxwell was elected to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous as a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee in 1971 and its chairman in 1978. Among the presentations he gave during his tenure was one on cooperation with non-A.A. professionals, which he delivered in 1971 at the Conference: “A.A.’s No. 1 concern should be the quality of A.A. itself.... This is the most important contribution which A.A. can make to the total field. Nevertheless, I believe that A.A. will not have its best future unless it *also—and within*



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*the Traditions*—continually concerns itself with good two-way communication with the non-A.A. alcoholism world.”

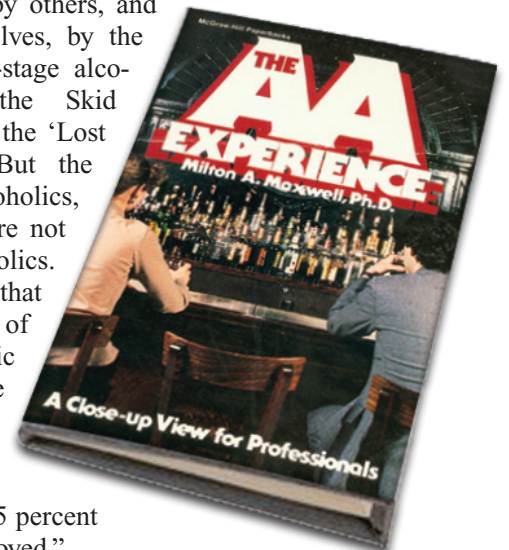
In another presentation, on anonymity, which he gave at the Conference in 1978, he says: “Originally, being anonymous was a simple response to the prevailing stigma. It was aimed at protecting individuals already in the groups and promised the same protection to anyone thinking about coming in. Then, from experience, emerged the understanding of anonymity’s spiritual values—for members personally, each group, and the Fellowship as a whole.”

He stepped down from the post in 1982, but continued to be involved with Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and A.A. as trustee emeritus. He was 81 years old at his death in 1988.

The Milton A. Maxwell Collection was donated to the General Service Office Archives by Charlotte Maxwell about a year later.

Among that collection is his pamphlet “Alcohol, Man, and Science,” published in 1965 by Washington State University. In it Maxwell challenges the stereotype of the alcoholic: “Alcoholism is a progressive illness with a very gradual, frequently imperceptible, onset.... Many alcoholics are hidden from recognition by others, and even from themselves, by the stereotype of late-stage alcoholics—perhaps the Skid Row type or even the ‘Lost Weekend’ type. But the majority of our alcoholics, at a given time, are not late-stage alcoholics. One study showed that almost 70 percent of the male alcoholic patients at a Seattle private hospital for alcoholics were married and living with spouse; 95 percent of them were employed.”

In another of his writings—“Hidden Alcoholic Employees”—Maxwell again took up the case of the alcoholic who escapes notice: “the alcoholic employee not only *can* be a ‘hidden man’ but *usually* is. Late-stage alcoholism



which seriously interferes with job performance can seldom be hidden and is seldom tolerated. But early-stage and even much of middle-stage alcoholism can be hidden—and most problem drinkers in industry are in these stages.”

In his research, Maxwell investigated the psychology of the alcoholic. In an article he wrote in 1950 (“Alcohol Addiction as a Sociogenic Personality Disorder”), he says: “alcohol effects an illusory adjustment which, in the course of time, creates new maladjustments, new problems, new tensions involving family, friends, and job.” Also from the same article: “self-esteem is shaken, guilt and remorse set in, and alcohol has the capacity of narcotizing this pain...”

Among Maxwell’s works is an article on the Washingtonian Movement that is familiar to A.A. members. In it Maxwell compares that temperance society of the 1840s with Alcoholics Anonymous. Begun in Baltimore in 1841, the Washingtonians numbered in the tens of thousands (and possibly well over 100,000) within a couple of years. “If there is uncertainty concerning the number of alcoholics temporarily helped or permanently rehabilitated ...there is no question that the movement made a tremendous impact,” according to Maxwell.

That impact, though, was relatively brief, with membership peaking in the mid-1840s and petering out soon thereafter. In comparing the Washingtonian Movement to A.A., Maxwell says that whereas there were obvious similarities, “the differences can be brought out ...by an analysis of the Alcoholics Anonymous program—its principles, practices and content.”

The most significant differences, and the reasons that A.A. has endured and the Washingtonians did not, says Maxwell in his article: are A.A.’s exclusively alcoholic membership; its singleness of purpose, which includes steering clear of “outside issues;” that it provides a program of recovery, including the Twelve Steps; its principle of anonymity; and the Traditions.

As it was noted in a workshop of the 1983 General Service Conference, Maxwell’s account of the Washingtonians “revealed that one cause of its collapse was the ego-stroking that the movement encouraged” and that “a clear-cut primary purpose became diffused into a muddle of worthy causes.”

In his farewell talk as chairman of the General Service Board, at the 1982 Conference, Maxwell said: “In a general society characterized by competitive striving for status, recognition, power, and their material symbols, A.A. has a recovery program based upon opposite values—upon learning and an unself-centered way of life.... Furthermore, A.A. has a collective life—Traditions, Concepts, minimum of structure—that is remarkably in harmony with and supportive of the basic recovery program.”

Soon after Maxwell had been elected Board chairman, Dr. Jack Norris, who served as a trustee on the Board from 1951 to 1978, had this to say about the new chairman: “I believe Milton Maxwell is too little appreciated in A.A., because he is so quiet. But because of his understanding heart, I think Milton may be A.A.’s greatest nonalcoholic friend in the field of alcoholism.”

## Sybil C., One of First Women To Find Sobriety in A.A.

Sybil C. got sober in A.A. in March 1941, and is thought to be the first female member of the Fellowship west of the Mississippi.

Her introduction to A.A. came on a day when she was coming off of a drunk and spotted a sign for “Sultan Turkish Baths.” As she remembers it, “I decided I could sweat it out there and get myself in shape, but I thought I’d better have something to read. So I stopped at the newsstand and bought a *Saturday Evening Post*—five cents. It was dated March 1, 1941, and on the cover it said, ‘*Alcoholics Anonymous*, by Jack Alexander.’”

After reading the article, she says: “even though I was just too sick to think, I knew there was hope.” That key article in the history of A.A. included contact information for the new Fellowship.

Sybil then “wrote a rather pitiful letter to New York. I said, ‘I am a desperate alcoholic and I’ll take the next plane back there and take your cure.’”

Her letter was answered a few days later by Ruth Hock, Bill W.’s secretary, who assured her that a trip to New York wasn’t necessary. Sybil, who was living in Los Angeles at the time, was directed by Ruth to the one A.A. meeting in the city.

When she arrived at the meeting place a few minutes before the starting time she found about a dozen men and a couple of women seated around a table. One of the men got up to announce the beginning of the meeting, and noted that it was time for the women to leave. “I later found out they

were the wives, who were quite used to leaving the meeting and waiting in the lobby. But I thought this had been cooked up to throw me out” says Sybil. Angry, she went out and got drunk.

But Ruth Hock had written, “if you need help, call Cliff W.,” who was a member of the group. When Sybil called him, he explained to her that the group members did not mean to exclude her from the meeting. “You didn’t tell us you were an alcoholic,” he said.



Cover of the March 1, 1941 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* containing the Jack Alexander article on *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Nursing a hangover, Sybil picked up a copy on her way into a steam bath, and it pointed her toward recovery.

She went to that next meeting and at the conclusion of it group members turned their attention to a stack of letters seeking information about A.A. that had been prompted by the Jack Alexander article.

After dividing up the letters among various members, the man taking charge of the operation turned to Sybil and said: "I've been saving this stack for the last because we now have a woman alcoholic. Her name is Sybil. Come up here, Sybil. I'm putting you in charge of all the women."

Her job then was to drive around and knock on the doors of the women who had written to A.A.

"Some of the letters were from landladies who wanted the guy upstairs not to make so much noise on a Saturday night, and sometimes it turned out the wife had written in for a husband who was an alcoholic. And some of them were from women who wanted help," said Sybil.

A few of those she visited that week became members. "The meeting grew—and I mean it mushroomed."

When Bill and Lois made their first visit to Los Angeles in 1943, Sybil was one of the delegation of local A.A.s who met them. She also later met Marty M., the first woman to achieve lasting sobriety in A.A.

Her brother, Tex, joined the week after she did. He started the second A.A. group in the area, and appointed Sybil coffee-maker and greeter. It was also where she gave her first qualification. When Tex died in 1952, she wrote to Bill W. to tell him of her grief.

### **A Letter From Bill W.**

In his response he wrote: "Thanks for your letter of October 21st - it was just about the most stirring thing I have read in many a day. The real test of our way of life is how it works when the chips are down. Though I've sometimes seen A.A.s make rather a mess of living, I've never seen a sober one make a bad job of dying.

"But the account you give me of Tex's last days is something I shall treasure always. I hope I can do half as well when my time comes. ..."

"As for you, my dear, there is no need to give you advice. ... This is but a long day in school. Some of the lessons are hard and others are easy. I know you will keep on learning and passing what you learned. ..."

Sybil became the executive secretary of the Los Angeles Central office of A.A., a position she held for 12 years.

She was honored at the International A.A. Convention in Montreal in 1985, when she was then the longest-sober woman in A.A. She told the story of A.A.'s beginning in Los Angeles, and when she finished, the audience gave her a standing ovation which continued so long some thought it would never stop.

Sybil died in 1988, having been sober in A.A. for 47 years.

*(Some parts of this article come from an account written by Nancy O. and posted online with the author's permission at [www.barefootworld.net/aasybilc.html](http://www.barefootworld.net/aasybilc.html)).*

## **Archives to Be Closed to Visitors During Three Months of Construction**

G.S.O. Archives will be closed to visitors and researchers beginning this November for approximately three months for reconstruction. The renovation will double the Archives storage space and add a new workroom to process collections. Modified shelving is being installed to store holdings in a way that makes better use of the space, while also complying with fire code regulations. The construction is limited to the Archives vault storage; the exhibit area, which is what visitors see, will remain unchanged.

During the time the Archives is closed, staff will be conducting limited internal and external research. Any inquiries received during this time will be addressed two to three months after the Archives reopens.

The G.S.O. Archives staff also will be working to update and refine its electronic records for more efficient use of the collection.

There will be limited displays in the G.S.O.'s reception area for visitors.



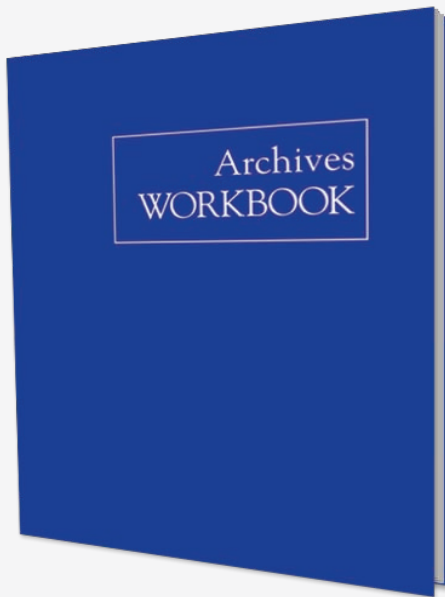
*These bowing shelves, which line the vault at G.S.O. Archives and hold the corporate records of Alcoholics Anonymous, are due for replacement in the reconstruction project.*

## **Copies of Grapevine, Box 4-5-9, and Conference Report Available for Free**

The G.S.O. Archives is giving away, on a first-come first-served basis, the following material to Archives that need them: copies of the AA Grapevine from 1944 through 1948; copies of *Box 4-5-9* from 1960 through 1999; and General Service Conference Reports (English only) for the years: 1981, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005.

Please note that supplies of all these issues are limited and we ask that you please inventory your collection before you contact us, so we can send you exactly what you need.

If interested, call us with your request at 212-870-3400, or send an email to [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org).



*The newly revised Archives Workbook, which includes format changes and additional copy aimed at raising awareness of copyright issues, is now available, in print and on G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org). The Workbook is being translated into Spanish and French.*

## Workshop on Preservation and Conservation Attracts Archivists in the Northwest

Area 92 (Eastern Washington) hosted the first Northwest Regional Archives Workshop, with attendees from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

The one-day event, which took place in June in the town of Ellensburg, focused on preservation and conservation techniques. Among the subjects addressed were dry cleaning and tissue repair of paper, tape removal, and the use of various repair tapes. Workshop organizers demonstrated the deacidification and encapsulation of documents.

A number of books suffering problems were looked over and repairs were done, as time permitted. Many workshop attendees brought items to be looked at and repaired, if possible. Those attending had ample opportunity to ask questions of the organizers on the practical problems of preservation and conservation. Handouts were available and catalogs were passed out to help in the procurement of supplies.

The goal was that attendees would leave the workshop with a rough working knowledge of conservation techniques, and feel they could—with practice—do some repair work on their own. Some thought has been given to making the Workshop an annual event.

*By Dave C., Conservator Area 72*

## Archivist Amy Filiatreau Leaves G.S.O. for University Post

Amy Filiatreau, who joined G.S.O. as archivist in February 2006, has resigned to become director for content management at a university library in Cincinnati. Her resignation became effective July 3.

Though not an A.A. member, Amy had considerable knowledge of the Fellowship, having attended numerous meetings in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, with relatives who are A.A. members.

“A.A. is a very challenging and rewarding place to work,” says Amy, who is moving for “family reasons, so that I can be of more help to my parents, who I’ll now be able to visit on weekends.”

Reflecting on her two and a half years at the G.S.O. Archives, she says, “I trust that I have left it in a position where whoever follows will be able to move a lot of projects through to completion.”

Her goal has been, she says, to increase “accessibility to the Archives by the Fellowship; we are there for them and this is what I wanted the archives to convey.”

Specifically, she says, “we tried to make it easier for A.A. members to get in touch with us to get the info they are looking for. This has had an impact; A.A. members have gotten the message that they can call us, that they can contact us for info and we will get it to them.

“Our research level in response to questions from the Fellowship increased 30% in 2006 and then 30% on top of that in 2007. This year it’s increasing at about the same rate,” says Amy.

“I would like to thank the archivists from the areas, districts, and central offices/intergroups, who do a lot of work for the Fellowship,” she says.

“My time here has made me appreciate so much more what A.A. does for the suffering alcoholic. I’ve heard so many stories that make me value how lucky we are that A.A. exists.”

### Coming Soon:

## Markings via E-mail

Have *Markings* delivered directly to your e-mail inbox by registering to subscribe at G.S.O.’s A.A. website, [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org). The registration link to *Markings* in digital form is scheduled to be up and running sometime in October. Other A.A. newsletters are also being made available via e-mail, and you will be able to register to receive them too.

