

## Dr. G. Kirby Collier, M.D.

Dr. G. Kirby Collier, a well-known physician from Rochester, New York, was one of A.A.'s earliest admirers in the psychiatric profession. He played a prominent role in helping to bring Alcoholics Anonymous to Rochester, New York. Having heard of A.A.'s success, Dr. Collier traveled to New York City in December of 1941 to investigate. During his visit, he met with Bill W. and attended meetings. He received literature and it was suggested that he introduce his alcoholic patients to the program.

Being convinced of the program's merits, he took Bill W.'s suggestion and met with three of his alcoholic patients in April 1942. Dr. Collier, believing it was best that they run their own meetings, gave the alcoholics the literature and explained the basics, then "threw them overboard," as he put it. Within several weeks the trio of alcoholics had grown to six. Initially they met in the home of one of the members, then settled on renting a room in the Seneca Hotel, effectively starting the Seneca Group, one of the first A.A. groups in Rochester, in July 1942. This year the Seneca Group will celebrate its 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary.

Dr. Collier remained in touch with Bill and invited him to speak on several occasions. In May of 1944, Dr. Collier invited Bill to speak at the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting. He wrote: "Psychiatry has come to some recognition of the work of A.A. Your association with the psychiatric group, I feel, should be enlarged. Of course, there are a large group of psychiatrists who are not familiar with the work of A.A. and I do feel that your appearance before this group would be of tremendous value."

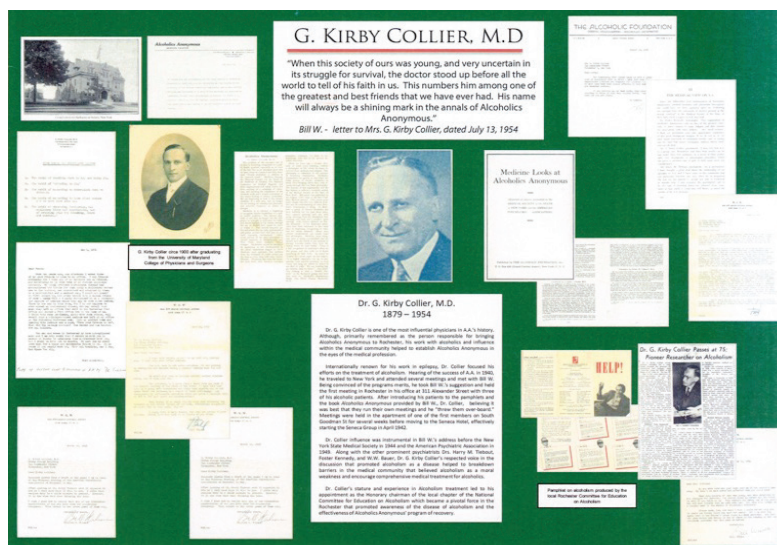
Bill recalled in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (pp. 2-3), "It was Dr. Tiebout, helped by Dr. Kirby Collier of Rochester and Dwight Anderson of New York, who persuaded the Medical Society of the State of New York in 1944 and later the American Psychiatric Association in 1949 to let me, a layman, read papers about A.A. at their annual gatherings, thus hastening the acceptance of the then little-known A.A. by physicians all over the globe."

Excerpts of Bill's talk were published in a pamphlet, "Medicine Looks at Alcoholics Anonymous." Included in this pamphlet,

published shortly after the 1944 talk, were comments made by Dr. Collier, Dr. Foster Kennedy, and Dr. Harry Tiebout. The paper would also be printed in the *New York State Journal of Medicine*. Dr. Collier's comments included: "Realizing how ineffectual our efforts in the treatment of the chronic alcoholic through the usually accepted psychiatric procedures were was my reason for investigating Alcoholics Anonymous. With one of their members I was privileged to attend a meeting in New York and had the opportunity of discussing their philosophy with Mr. W. First, I was impressed with the honesty and sincerity of those members I met, and, second, with the broad socio-religious background and its psychiatric implications — chiefly a man's recognition of self, his abilities as well as his inefficiencies and that intangible power which all mankind recognizes, whether he acknowledges it or not. Upon my return home, I asked three chronic alcoholics, all of twenty to twenty-five years' duration, to organize a group, after going over the situation with them as I understood it. These three contacted others and held their first meeting in the small apartment of one. Growing, they approached me for a place to meet. We eliminated the Y.M.C.A., Public Library, church halls, or parish houses for obvious reasons, and at last advised a room in one of our large centrally located hotels. This has worked out nicely and meetings are held each Sunday afternoon and Wednesday evening. From the original group of three, contacts have been made with over 500."

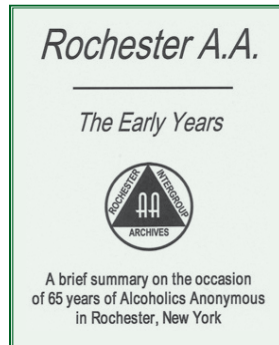
Also at Dr. Collier's invitation, Bill participated in an alcoholism symposium at the American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting in Montreal, May 1949. His address marked the acceptance of A.A. by yet another major American medical organization. Bill's address is titled "The Society of Alcoholics Anonymous." Excerpts of this address can be found in the pamphlet, "Three Talks to Medical Societies by Bill W."

What Dr. Collier has meant to A.A. can be best summed up by Bill himself. In a letter to his widow on hearing of the doctor's passing, he wrote: "When this society of ours was young, and very uncertain in its struggle for survival, the doctor stood up before all the world to tell of his faith in us. This numbers him among one of the



greatest and best friends that we have ever had. His name will always be a shining mark in the annals of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

New information on Dr. Collier’s contribution to A.A. has recently been revealed in letters and correspondence donated to the Rochester Intergroup Archives by his grandchildren. The donation consisted of the Doctor’s personal scrapbook containing photographs, correspondence, and personal memorabilia highlighting his long career. The Dr. G. Kirby Collier collection is part of the Rochester Intergroup Archives collection that is housed at the Rochester Medical Museum and Archives, in Rochester, New York. For more information please contact Rochester Intergroup Central Office at (585) 232-6720 or <http://www.rochester-ny-aa.org>.



Article written with contributions by Robert D., Rochester Intergroup Archivist

## Oral Histories Kit Revisions



The newest edition of G.S.O. Archives’ Oral Histories Kit is now available. It features a new section called, “What Is Oral History?” and a sample Thank You Letter. The Biographical Sketch and Sample Interview Questions have been revised. In addition, the Sources for More Information section has been updated to provide the most recent and accurate information. It is available for print directly from A.A.’s Web site at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org), or you may contact the Archives Department at 212-870-3400 or [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org).

## Archival Exhibit — A Guide

One of the main functions of an archives is to make available the records it collects and preserves. Putting material on display in an exhibition can be an excellent way to accomplish this task. Exhibits not only educate the public on the subject at hand, but also increase interest in and inform visitors of the work of archivists. This article is an attempt to provide some basic principles in developing an exhibition.

The first step in creating an exhibit is to determine the subject you wish to build upon. It is important that the exhibition have a clear theme, and that it tells a story with a strong narrative. This is not to say that an exhibit must be extensive; on the contrary, an exhibit can consist of only a few items. However, it is important that the items all revolve around a common theme. If you have difficulty deciding upon a subject, consider the content of your archival collections. What do you specialize in? Are there any individuals or events you have a great deal of information about? What are the strengths of your archives? Determining this will probably supply you with ideas for more than one exhibit. You can also plan exhibits around anniversaries or special occasions. For example, here at the G.S.O. Archives, we create exhibits about the General Service Conference, the International Convention, the World Service Meeting, and the Founders’ Day Anniversary, around the time when those events are held. You can also use the interests of your audience as a guide to developing your exhibit. If you are to have visitors with a common background, or if you know that members in your vicinity are interested in a certain topic, you can plan accordingly.

After choosing a subject for your exhibition, you can pick items to put on display. Try to select pieces that are both historically significant and visually appealing. Remember that practically any item can be used as an exhibit, including photographs, published works, manuscripts (unpublished writings), artifacts, and more. However, it is necessary to ensure that the items you choose relate to the subject of the exhibition and to one another. As archivists for A.A., it is also important to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of members. Make sure that you do not identify members in text or image. Also, ensure that no confidential information, such as addresses and telephone numbers, are on display. As with other events in A.A., it is strongly recommended that your exhibit adheres to the Twelve Traditions, particularly those pertaining to anonymity. Make sure to listen to the group conscience concerning the design and implementation of your exhibit. Yet, at the same time, you should ensure that archival standards are maintained to the best of your ability in every aspect of your exhibit. Bear in mind that you are, essentially, telling a story, and make sure that the items you select contribute to it. It is of paramount importance that the context of the materials be evident. Supply background information by means of the exhibit labels you write, and make sure that the relationship between the items and the subject is understood. It is also a good idea to use a variety of items, and to add depth to the exhibit by the use of three-dimensional pieces.

There are also some things to avoid when constructing an exhibit. Make sure that the items are not in direct sunlight, and attempt to place them in an area with consistent levels of heat and humidity. Also, try to avoid using items which are in poor condition. Not only is this unsightly, but being on display



## ‘What Would the Master Do?’

One of the frequent inquiries we receive in the Archive regards the story behind the statement, “I am the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism...” as related in the Third Tradition, (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 142-43).

For many years we did not know the details behind this reference. Then it was discovered that the story of the “double stigma” was enlarged upon by Bill W. in a talk he gave at the 1968 General Service Conference.

“...The group conscience began to say to us, ‘The common welfare comes first. We do not have these biases [of power, prestige, or money]. Let *us* take thought for the general welfare, and after that, let’s see where the leadership stands.’ So we turn up as leaders who have not power in the usual sense, not prestige in the usual sense. We turn up as genuine servants with a discretion from the group conscience to act for them. And that’s our state here. The general welfare comes first.

“Take another which at first glance might seem a little remote. At about year two, of the Akron group, a poor devil came to Dr. Bob in a grievous state. He could qualify as an alcoholic, all right. And then he said, ‘Dr. Bob, I’ve got a real problem to pose you. I don’t know if I could join A.A., because I’m a sex deviate.’ Well, that had to go out to the group conscience, you know. Up to then it was supposed that any society could say who was going to join it.

“And pretty soon the group conscience began to seethe and boil, and it boiled over. And, ‘Under no circumstances could we have such a peril, and such a disgrace, among us,’ said a great many.

“And you know, right then our destiny hung on a razor edge over this single case. In other words, would there be rules that could exclude so-called undesirability? And that caused us in the time and for quite a time, respecting this single case, to ponder, what is the more important: the reputation that we shall have? What people shall think? Or is it our character? And who are *we*, considering *our* records? Alcoholism is quite as unlovely. Who are *we* to deny a man his opportunity? *Any* man, or woman?

“And finally the day of resolution came. And a bunch were sitting in Dr. Bob’s living room, arguing, ‘What to do?’ Whereupon, dear old Bob looked around and blandly said, ‘Isn’t it time, folks, to ask ourselves, what would the Master do in a situation like this? Would He turn this man away?’

“And that was the beginning of the A.A. tradition that any man who has a drinking problem is a member of A.A. if he says so, not whether we say so.

“Now, I think that the import of this on the common welfare has already been staggering. Because it takes in even more territory than the confines of our Fellowship. It takes in the whole world of alcoholics. Their charter to freedom, to join A.A., is assured. Indeed, it was an act in the general welfare.”

## From the G.S.O. Archives

Five new individual photos are now available from the G.S.O. Archives. These 8x10 black and white photos consist of Bill W. and Lois W. standing in their garden at Stepping Stones; Bill playing the violin; Bill at the 1955 General Service Conference with a copy of the Second Edition of the Big Book; Dr. Bob leaning against his car; and Father Ed Dowling.

These photos are available to A.A. members and groups only for use within the Fellowship. It is the policy of the General Service Office Archives to maintain the anonymity of all members, living or deceased, including our cofounders, at the level of public media. There is a suggested contribution of \$2.75 for each photograph to help defray the costs of printing and shipping. To request any of these photos, please contact the G.S.O. Archives at 212-870-3400 or by e-mail at [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org).

## The G.S.O. Archives needs your help...

We are looking for a 1973 General Service Conference Manual. A manual is given to each Conference member for use at the Conference and includes data such as the Conference agenda, committee rosters, board reports, G.S.O./GV reports and presentations. Please check your archives or ask past delegates or other members in your area. We would be happy to receive a copy of the manual or the original if you are willing to donate it to the G.S.O. Archives.