

MARKINGS

YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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A Community Assembles and Grows

In Akron, Ohio, the city where Alcoholics Anonymous began in the spring of 1935, the Archives Workshop participants confirmed that the new weekend conferences were proving valuable and meeting their need to assemble and share. Beginning with a small number of announcement flyers and word-of-mouth throughout the A.A. Archives community, 93 registered for the first Workshop sessions, October 25-27, 1996. One hundred and twenty-three had registered for the 1997 Archives Workshop, September 26-28, at the Ramada Plaza Hotel. Participants arrived from over 20 U.S. States and Canadian Provinces, and addresses were shared for correspondence and potential networking.

Organized and chaired by the Akron Intergroup archivist, Gail L., and supported by the Akron Intergroup Council, the restored sections of the Mayflower Hotel (currently named the Mayflower Manor, an assisted-living facility) served as the central site for the first-year's Workshop sessions. A beautiful and unique gift was dedicated during Friday night's opening session. With its exterior and walkup lobby restored to mid-1930s opulence, a permanent installation was unveiled in the Mayflower's lobby, created from photographs and the artistic work of Akron Archives members. Facing a framed photograph of A.A. co-founder Bill W. on the opposite wall of the oval lobby, a 1930s-era pay telephone and a replica of the hotel's 1935 Church Directory were placed next to the original location of telephone booths.

At Friday's night kickoff meeting, attendees were treated to a short tour of the Mayflower's past layout, including where the bar and hotel desk were located. A great sense of the site's history was given in talks by former staff of the Mayflower Hotel and vignettes of Akron A.A. history from local longtime A.A. members.

At the 1997 Workshop, the entire podium in the Ramada auditorium was filled with A.A. members who had traveled to the Workshop from Iowa, Illinois, Florida, Texas, Michi-

gan, Oklahoma, as well as Ohio. The '97 Oldtimers Panel also continued outside the meeting room with over two dozen A.A.s briefly sharing their long lives in the Fellowship. Question and answer sessions followed the personal histories.

Both years' Archives Workshop held multi-track activities for its Saturday afternoon sessions. The University of Akron Archives, which are near the Mayflower, opened for a guided tour. The Akron A.A. Archives, located in the intergroup office north of the downtown area, also opened to greet Workshop participants. Guided trips to the many Akron historical A.A. sites were given by volunteers, many of whom serve as their group's Archives Representatives. The personal perspective given to the many small "groups of A.A. tourists" delivered a much-appreciated insight into Akron's place in A.A. history, and the agreeable fall weather was a definite plus each year. In 1996 Bob W., Area 4 Arkansas archivist, chaired a very informative, hands-on training session on conservation techniques and procedures; at the 1997 Workshop he chaired two levels of introductory and advanced sessions.

The added Breakout Sessions for 1997's Workshop included a slide presentation and tour of the A.A. Archives at Little Rock, Arkansas, given by Fay W., Area 4's assistant archivist, in her presentation, "Starting an Archive." The auditorium was further sectioned off for an Authors' panel, with Sue W., Mel B., Mary D., and Ernie K. sharing their experiences.

On Saturday night in 1996, David A. of Texas, past (Class B) trustee of the General Service Board, and active many years in service, delivered a talk from his research on the "Writing of the Big Book." David's keen insight and quick Texas wit energized the atmosphere in the overflowing crowd, as he related some of the more humorous events in that great undertaking of 1939.

The same level of energy was duplicated in 1997 when author Ernie K. of Michigan gave a presentation on the "Varieties of A.A. Histories." Currently a tenured professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, Ernie is the author of



Permanent display in lobby of old Mayflower Hotel.

Not God, the well-known history of Alcoholics Anonymous. He shared, from an exciting archival perspective, themes of the different disciplines that comprise the recovery program of A.A. today, and he spoke of both the benefits and dangers that new disciplines currently bring to our Fellowship.

Participants at both the first and second Workshops were invited to an after-hours Open House at the restored site of A.A. co-founder Dr. Bob's home. Following the Saturday night speaker-led Open Meeting, many visited the house and shared fellowship late into the night, filling the kitchen, living room, front porch, and spilling over to its Foundation's archives in the house next door.

In 1996, the following Presentations and Sharing were heard at the Mayflower:

Ethics and Archives Service: David A. (Dallas) on Traditions and Archives; Fay W. (Arkansas) on Guidelines for Area and Intergroup Archivists. The archivist panel: Fay W. on the Area 4 Arkansas archives; Judit Santon (non-alcoholic), G.S.O. Archives, on Classification Policies; Rick T. (Illinois) on One Area's Success in Publishing a Comprehensive History.

The weekend ended with a tribute to Nell Wing, A.A.'s first archivist, celebrating her many years of service to Alcoholics Anonymous. A phone call was placed to Nell in New York City, and she was advised that a special, hand-painted plaque was being sent from the Workshop.

In 1997 Presentations and Sharing Sessions held at the Ramada Plaza:

Early A.A. Publications and Newsletters Panel: Gail L. (Akron), Wally Z. (Chicago), Ron R. (SE Pennsylvania) and Judit Santon. Archivist Panel: Judit Santon on the new A.A. Guidelines on Archives and on the trustees' Archives Committee; Paul L. (Stepping Stones Foundation) on Finders' Aids and Database Retrieval; Fay W. on Anonymity and A.A. Archives. In closing, a farewell letter from Frank M., retiring G.S.O. archivist, was read, and the weekend concluded with a "brainstorming" session.

The 1998 Archives Workshop will again be held in Akron at the end of September. Inquiries can be directed to the Akron Archives, c/o Akron Intergroup Office, 775 North Main Street, Akron, OH 44310.

Rick T., Northern Illinois Area archivist

Janeen M. Shares from Bernice, California

Last September I started attending the monthly Archives Committee meetings. Intrigued, I looked in our district's file cabinet drawer. This led to more interest, and to a consideration of working with the archives. I announced at my district meeting that I would give it a try, attending meetings and working days at the archives.

So far I've shuffled through two boxes and a filing cabinet drawer full of papers. The empty gaps are the hardest to

deal with, so I decided to interview the lady who helped me almost 20 years ago and is now living in the Yountville Veterans Home. I used the interview questions from the Archives Handbook. She was like a drill sergeant and never took any guff, so it was reasonable to feel a bit nervous. I had no idea how exciting it would be to hear her talk about her general service journey. What a gift. I came home that afternoon on a cloud.

There was a message on my answering machine that the First Street Group was celebrating its 12th Anniversary and would like more information about early members. I had found the original registration form at the archives in November and had given the group the date at the December business meeting. I knew the lady from outside of A.A., and she had left the state and I hadn't talked to her in several years. Through a mutual friend I was able to call her in Washington State and get a lot of details and even found out that one of the four or five early members still lived in town. So, after a few phone calls, a page and a half was written!

The next night an early member was present when this five-minute history was read. He shared how overwhelmed he was by the group's present size and said that it had struggled in the first two years with only four or five members. He mentioned that he would start coming again. It was powerful. There was also a new respect for our velvet collection bag with two wooden handles--you could put your money in, but you had to let go to get your hand back out. Most thought that this bag had belonged to the church where the group is meeting now, but it was, in fact, donated by one of the founding members and came from a church in San Francisco. There was a feeling of belonging.

I guess I understand the prejudice about archives: I thought it was going to be dusty, musty boxes in the attic, a few rolls of microfiche, and so on. I was wrong!

Observations of an Early Starter

In my first year of sober living, my sponsor decided I should be introduced to Bill W. George (my sponsor) had gotten sober through correspondence from Bill, by reading the *Saturday Evening Post* article of March 1941, and by losing his business and family. Bill had sent him literature and, after many telephone talks, with Bill's convincing manner, George stayed sober and got a group started in the small town in Ontario where he lived. The area, at the time, was designated as part of the "Niagara Frontier Groups," with the central office in Buffalo, N.Y. across the border. Toronto, Ontario was 100 miles away, considered too far to serve as the central office for the Canadian groups in the area.

George had become a salesman for one of the firms he had dealt with when he had his business. He traveled

Put those early timers to work! Pass It On! Compile your group's history!

throughout Southern Ontario and of course Bill had him at work getting groups started in some of the towns on his route. We of A.A. know that Bill had a soft spot for salesmen who arrived at the doors of A.A. It was obvious to him that they would go back to work as soon as they were able. Bill also knew that an "alcoholic salesman," when sober, excelled in the business. What better way to "pass the message." George told me that Bill referred to salesmen as "My boys on the road." They were "our unsung pioneers," who delivered the Big Book, literature and the A.A. message to distant places during the Great Depression. There were no jobs and money was scarce, yet A.A. survived through those precarious times.

I was kept busy. We traveled a lot, visiting other meetings. Attending meetings in Buffalo, I was privileged to meet some of the first members, though I did not realize the significance of this at the time. The impressions, however, were indelible, remaining to give me a solid path to follow. George kept me in the midst of things as much as he could, and it was inevitable that I would get cocky. To take care of this, George told me that we were going to Akron on my next long weekend off from work. It was an anniversary, with Bill as the speaker. When the meeting ended I was striving to penetrate the crowd to get to him and perhaps get a handshake. George stopped me and said, "Bill will be out of here before you can get to him. Let's get out of here so we can go to the next place." I couldn't make out what he meant but I always followed orders.

We sped away from Kings School and arrived at a clubhouse somewhere in Akron. It was an old building with couches and a coffee bar, and there were a number of elderly people on the couches, some with canes. The room started to fill up with people. There was a short hush when Bill entered. Most of the elderly people began weeping when he went over to them. George told me later that Bill had not been to Akron for quite some time and some people were fearful that they would not see him again. After the tearful reunion had settled down, George spoke to Bill, they looked my way and Bill made his way through the crowd, which was overjoyed at seeing him.

George introduced me to Bill and I told Bill I had been saving a seat for him. Bill then stood on the couch and thanked everyone and apologized for not being able to visit his good friends earlier, since he had been busy on the new book. Evidently George had told Bill that I was a W.W. II veteran, and after asking me where I had served, Bill told me about the "near miss" he had experienced during artillery practice just prior to the end of W.W. I.

I recall little of the conversation I had with Bill, our co-founder and the grand-sponsor to all of us, until he described an incident he was involved with in France during W.W. I, which he also described in "Pass It On."

Erik K, Mobile, Alabama

Won't you share your group's history with us? Each group history we receive is added to that group's file.

History of Parkside Group, Philadelphia, PA

The Parkside Group, originally known as the Parkside Interracial Group, was founded on March 9, 1951.

Although Alcoholics Anonymous had come to Philadelphia in February 1940, very few black alcoholics came into the program. A group was started in the 1940s, and though its existence was short-lived, as a Parkside old-timer stated: "We learned a lot from that early effort, which helped us survive our struggles in the beginning."

One of our deceased oldtimers, Ray S., first came to A.A. at that time. He later came back to Parkside in the early '60s and became an outstanding Twelfth Stepper and trusted servant at the group and intergroup levels. Ray was known and loved by many people in Philadelphia and all over Alcoholics Anonymous.

Parkside's first meeting was held at the YMCA at 714 North 43rd Street, and was attended by Ed B. and Jim B., the group's co-founders. They were joined by Art McM. and Joe M. of the 4021 Senior Group. Art and Joe were very strong supporters of our fledgling group, and Marge G. and Ted R. were also helpful. Meetings were on Thursday nights.

The problem was how to attract the suffering black and minority alcoholics, and that is why the "Interracial" in the group name was used to send a message of welcome. In 1951 integration had hardly begun. Many A.A. groups and members were not at ease and uninformed on how to help. This is not an indictment of Philadelphia A.A. but a fact of American life in the 1950s. (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* and Jim's story in the Big Book, also address this issue.)

The group's early growth was slow. The first three new people who came were women, but they did not stay. Finally, Andy G., a relative of Jim B.'s, came and became the third member. He was followed by Barney H., Jacky S., (our first female member), Harry K., Lou R., Ed N., Georgia C., Mary C., and Ethel N.

The first anniversary meeting was held at the old Central High School. Its primary focus was on reaching the black and minority community, and an intensive effort was made through letters to doctors, ministers and social workers. Emphasis was also placed on black churches as well as on radio stations and press releases. To stimulate interest we had two non-A.A. speakers: Dr. Martin D. Kissen, a life-long friend of A.A., and Mr. Anthony, a popular radio host of the time who wanted to help A.A. Jim B., our co-founder, was the A.A. speaker. This first anniversary was a success because, surprisingly, a couple hundred people showed up!

Still, growth was slow and the small group persevered by carrying the message anywhere and anytime. Sometime in 1953 the group got its own place at 904 Walnut Street, which was at first a mixed blessing. Many times the group members had to dig into their own pockets to come up with the rent.

More members started to come in the late 1950s and early 1960s. We increased our Twelfth Step work by carrying the message to other groups in the Delaware Valley and out of town: for example, to the Cosmopolitan Group in Washington

D.C., the Stuyvesant Group in Brooklyn, and to groups in Baltimore, Allentown, Wilmington, Reading and New Jersey. Our group was very active in Philadelphia Intergroup and encouraged taking more commitments to hospitals, institutions and prisons. The Parkside Group was active at the general service area and district levels as well. In fact, Lou R., Ted R. and Dick C. worked hard to help set up the district as the link between the group, area and the General Service Conference. Lou later became the Eastern Pennsylvania Area delegate and the first black General Service Conference delegate in A.A. Bill W., co-founder of A.A., was especially gratified by this development because it set another precedent for the Fellowship.

The importance of the support Parkside received from other groups cannot be overstated; these groups helped strengthen the Parkside Group, especially during the first five years. We added a weekly Step meeting on Tuesday nights in the early '60s. We carried the message in the *Philadelphia Tribune* in the '50s and the *Philadelphia Independent* in the early '60s. These articles included basic quotes from A.A. literature and members' "stories," which were prepared and edited by one of the longtime members. Later, Bill J. succeeded in getting a radio program on station WDAS, which grew and was taken over by the intergroup. Mr. Joe Rainey of WDAS was always cooperative in giving us air time each year for our anniversary. We also made ourselves available to churches, particularly in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey, to share our strength, hope and life-saving experiences.

Another accomplishment was starting the Beginners Meeting on Monday nights, and forming a Sponsorship Committee around 1966. Sobriety for many people began there. Parkside's annual July 4th picnic began at "904." We also had many social activities in members' homes; one member had an open house on Christmas Day.

Because of redevelopment, in June 1969 the group moved to 5200 Walnut Street, where we occupied the second and third floors. As we had hoped, this move proved an opportunity for enhanced growth. We added a Big Book Meeting on Saturdays, and started our annual New Year's Eve Party, which was followed by a special meeting of gratitude. This was a period of accomplishment for us. Groups started in other sections of the city, beginning with the North Philly Group. We were beginning to see a dream come true — seeing A.A. spread and the lives of our brothers and sisters being saved.

For many years Parkside sponsored the "Court Ward" meeting at Byberry Prison at the request of Chaplain Glenn. In the '70s, the Intergroup Prison Committee took over this commitment.

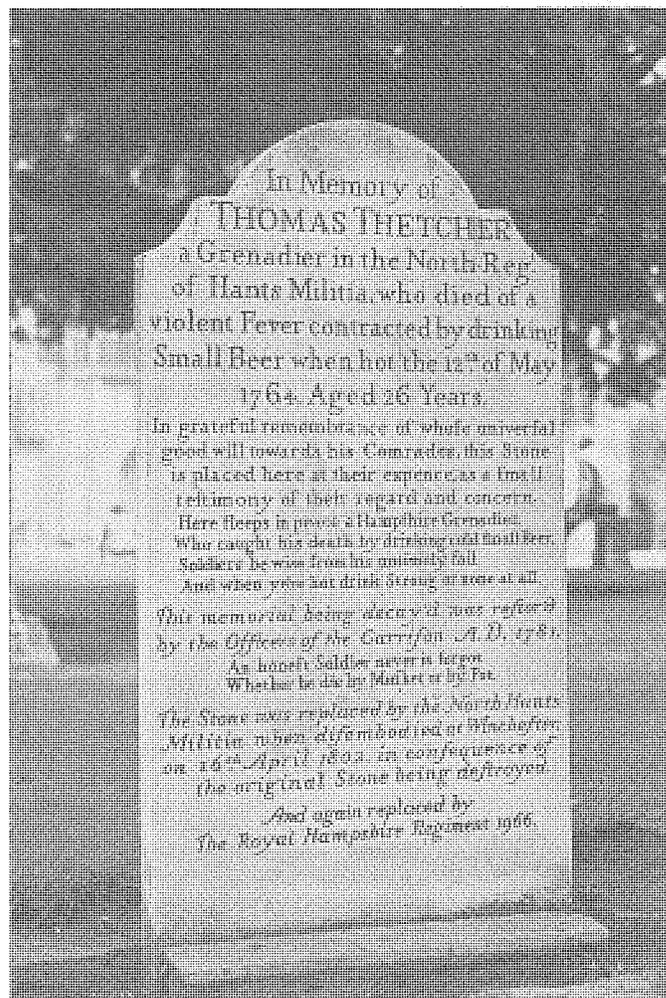
Because the new owner at 5200 Walnut Street wanted the entire building for his business, we had to move again. In July 1977 we moved to 6203-05 Market Street. The group enjoyed continued growth there for a time, but then a series of problems began. Vandalism was one of the worst, and put the acceptance, courage to change, and wisdom of the program to a severe test. The problem was so serious that a

special meeting was held following our 29th Anniversary, and on March 7, 1980, we voted to move as soon as possible. On Saturday, March 15, we had our first meeting at 5053 Walnut Street.

Since then we have done many things: started the weekend Alkathon, added a monthly women's and a monthly men's meeting and a Saturday midnight meeting, improved our group guidelines and began an Operating Committee Meeting. In September 1989 we formed an Archives Committee to try to put together a written and oral history of the group.

Much has been done by Parkside, and much remains to be done. We believe that the God of our understanding will continue to pour His grace on us so long as we rightly relate ourselves to Him. A word of encouragement to our many younger and newer Parkside members — Keep on coming back!!

Herman L., member of Philadelphia Intergroup's Archives Committee



Headstone in Winchester Cathedral churchyard, England, that got Bill W.'s attention when he visited in 1918. The story is related in "Pass It On" (page 60).