

Treating the “Dreadful Havock” of Alcoholism

Alcoholism has been around just as long as alcohol has. Solomon lamented in Proverbs almost 3000 years ago, “Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine.” Roger Bacon, a 13th Century English philosopher and writer on alchemy and medicine, recommended wine with meals, but warned about the dangers of gin: “If it be over-much guzzled, it will on the contrary do a great deal of harm: For it will darken the understanding, ill-affect the brain... beget shaking of the limbs and blear-eyedness.”

In America, the first sign of some understanding of alcoholism as an addiction came with the publication of Anthony Benezet’s *Mighty Destroyer Displayed* in 1774. It was the earliest American essay about the “dreadful havock” wreaked by spirituous liquors and it challenged the view that alcohol was a benign substance that kept away illness and could be usefully substituted for contaminated water. Alcohol, wrote Benezet (a respected teacher and early abolitionist) created “dram-drinkers bound in slavery...drop begets drams and drams beget more drams,” one of the first American allusions to the progressive nature of alcohol addiction.

This was followed in 1782 by “An Inquiry Into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind,” a 17-page medical paper by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a student of Benezet’s. Rush, a physician, member of the Continental Congress and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, called alcoholism “a progressive and odious disease” and urged complete abstinence as the only effective treatment. (He advised families who had problem drinkers to inscribe the words “Taste not, handle not, touch not” on any bottle that contained alcohol.)

Rush’s paper was widely circulated and well received, becoming a cornerstone document of the Temperance Movement. In an 1810 essay entitled “Plan for an Asylum for Drunkards to be called the Sober House,” Rush became the first American to call for a special facility for alcoholics, although so-called “inebriate homes” were not established until the 1850s.

Sobriety-based mutual aid societies probably began in America in the 1730s with the Native American “recovery circles” where tribal members who

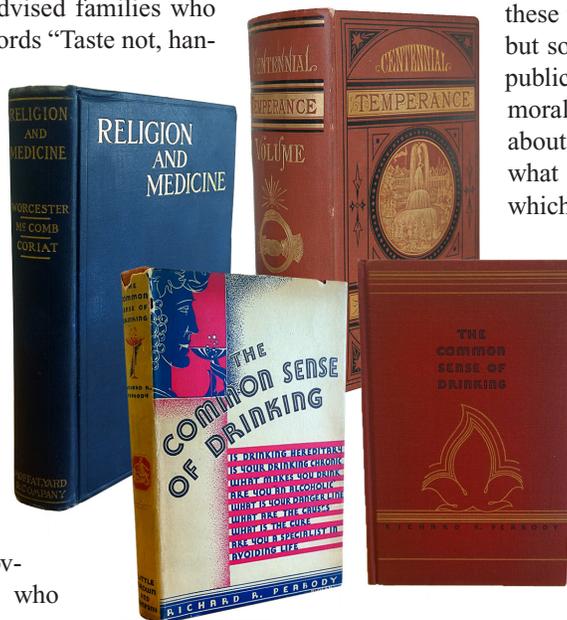
survived their own bouts with the bottle would help others—the circles saw alcohol as a symbol of white oppression and preached abstinence as a means of Native cultural revival.

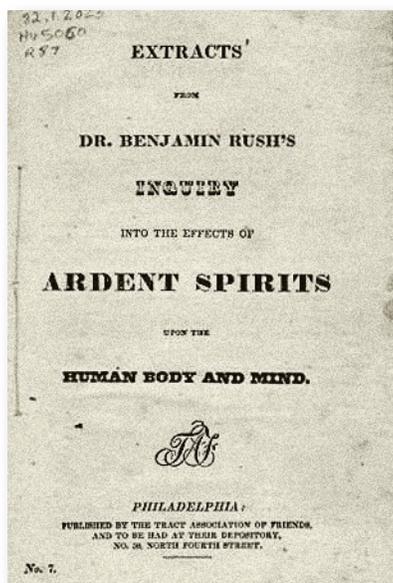
But the first large abstinence based temperance movement in the U.S. was the Washingtonian Temperance Society, which was founded in April 1840 by six drunks from a drinking club at Chase Tavern in Baltimore. Seeking to help those they termed “sots” and “hard cases” recover, they tried to keep their message simple and not moralistic. A sot could change his life through certain steps. 1) Public confession (telling one’s story) and commitment (signing a pledge that required personal abstinence). 2) Reaching out to other alcoholics. 3) Material assistance (to those alcoholics worse off). 4). Sober recreation.

Word of the Washingtonians spread rapidly over the course of the next decade, in part because of charismatic speakers like John Gough and John Hawkins, who traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, giving impassioned temperance speeches. The rise of the Washingtonians prefigures that of Alcoholics Anonymous in numerous regards. The initial publicity they received in the press and among prominent figures of the day was quite positive (Abraham Lincoln made an admiring address to a Washingtonian group in Springfield in 1842). A “Martha Washington Society” arose for the spouses of the men afflicted, and also to provide support for women and teenage drunks. (One of their early slogans was “Total abstinence or no husband!”)

A centerpiece of the Washingtonian movement was the weekly meetings held by local groups. At first these were closed meetings (for “Sots Only”) but soon most were opened up to the general public. At these meetings, people shared, not moralistic tales of recovery or fiery threats about hellfire, but their own experience—what it had been like, what it was like now, which struck a deep chord with those tired of being told they were wicked or sinful. The rise of the Washingtonians was astonishing—500,000 pledged members within 5 years—but so was the movement’s fall. By 1847, the group had all but died out.

What happened? The reasons for the demise of the Washingtonians are complex and not fully understood. They include conflicts with local religious leaders who sought a more God-based recovery program; the





1782 medical paper by
Dr. Benjamin Rush

or fraternities, but the movement did leave its mark by re-energizing the temperance movement in America, and by leaving behind the example of a successful (at least for a time) mutual aid society run by alcoholics, for alcoholics.

Another promising answer for the reclamation of the alcoholic was the Emmanuel Movement, founded by a clergyman psychologist, Elwood Worcester, in 1906. Worcester had a deep conviction that the physician and clergyman could work more effectively together in the treatment of mental and emotional ills; he had studied in Leipzig with Gustav Fechner, one of the pioneers in psychotherapy and one of Carl Jung's professors. His book outlining his theories, *Religion and Medicine, the Moral Control of Nervous Disorders*, appeared in 1908 and had nine printings in the year of publication. Alcoholism constituted the largest category within "nervous disorders."

Two successful graduates of the process were Courtenay Baylor, who became the first paid alcoholism lay counselor, and Richard Peabody, a prominent lay therapist and author of *The Common Sense of Drinking*, a runaway best-seller of its day (1930), that had found a home in Bill W.'s library. In *The Common Sense of Drinking*, Peabody advocated a concept of surrender reminiscent of A.A.'s First Step:

"The first step to sobriety is surrender to the fact that the alcoholic cannot drink again without disastrous results." The patient, he said, also needs to be convinced that he needs help. In the same book he used the phrase "half measures are to no avail," most likely Bill W.'s source for the phrase "half measures availed us nothing."

A.A.'s immediate ancestor, the Oxford Group, later renamed Moral Rearmament, was an evangelical Christian movement started in the 1920s by Frank Buchman. It had a profound influence on the early development of Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill W. and Dr. Bob attended Oxford Group meetings to find help with their drinking, and it was Oxford Groupers who brought them together. The Akron A.A.s were active in group

dilution of closed meetings by a curious public not necessarily seeking sobriety; the fact that speakers like John Gough began to receive sizeable sums to preach the word, thus turning them into paid temperance speakers; and the fact that Washingtonians became embroiled in political issues like the prohibition and abolitionist movements, which divided them into opposing factions. Those Washingtonians who did not return to drinking retreated into local temperance clubs

meetings, and once Bill W. returned to New York from Ohio after meeting Dr. Bob, he was greatly influenced by Dr. Samuel Shoemaker of Calvary Church, a leader of the U.S. Oxford Group and one of the earliest and staunchest friends of A.A. among the clergy.

Bill W. asserts in *A.A. Comes of Age*, that all of A.A.'s spiritual principles come directly from the Oxford Group. Four basic Oxford Group principles became the foundation for A.A.'s Twelve Steps: surrendering to God through rigorous self-examination, confession of character defects to another human being, making restitution for harm done to others, and giving without thought of reward. More problematic for the alcoholics, though, were the "Four Absolutes": absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love. For a Fellowship that was to ultimately acknowledge, "we seek spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection," absolute values were hard to swallow.

A.A.s attended Oxford Group meetings regularly for about the first two years, somewhat longer in Akron, but broke away for several reasons. Frank Buchman was not particularly interested in helping drunks — he concentrated increasingly on working with world leaders to bring peace. Further, the A.A. pioneers believed that the Oxford Group's evangelical approach would not work with alcoholics, and they had come up with the concept of "God as we understood him" rather than a specifically Christian or religious approach.



Alcohol Abstinence Pledge Card (undated)

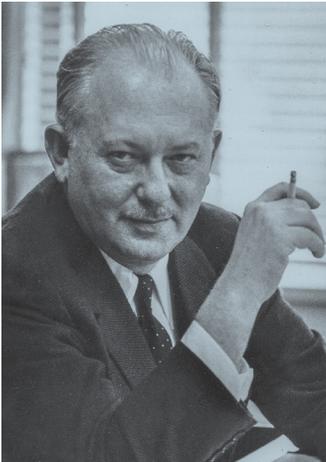
waited outside. Today it is little known outside of Alcoholics Anonymous—like the Washingtonians and the Peabody Movement—but together all these groups helped bring aid to suffering alcoholics, and helped form Alcoholics Anonymous as we know it today.

A.A. Archives Workshop

The 20th National A.A. Archives Workshop (U.S. and Canada) will be held September 8-11, 2016 at the Concord Hilton in Concord, California. With the theme "The Road of Happy Destiny". The program will include speakers, presentations, workshops and panels. Saturday evening will feature an A.A. History Play.

Registration is \$40 should be made before September 1st. For more information visit the website: www.naaaw2016.org, or call Laura W. at 925-272-9209.

Bernard Smith and the Group Conscience



Although Bernard Smith wasn't an alcoholic—he liked to call himself a “one-fisted drinker”—he was one of the most eloquent voices Alcoholics Anonymous has ever known. A prominent lawyer and author, Smith joined the Alcoholic Foundation (later the General Service Board) in 1944 as a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and served as its chair and the chair of the General Service Conference from 1951 to 1956. After that,

he became board vice-chair until his death in 1970.

In the late 1940s, Smith was responsible for helping Bill W. convince the reluctant trustees that a yearly General Service Conference was crucial to the survival of A.A. After that, “Bern” Smith (as he was known) was an essential part of the General Service Conference. From 1951 to 1969, he gave about nine articulate and expressive talks to the Conference, wonderfully codifying his vision of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In 1951, at the very first Conference, Smith told the assembled delegates that “conferences such as these will form for all time the distilling agent by which concepts and traditions will be preserved, power avoided and all that is rich and necessary in A.A. never destroyed. Those checks and balances it is for you to create, for you to find and for you to determine.”

In years to come, Smith gave talks which focused on A.A. and the world at large. In his remarks in 1953, he said that “the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous are principles which constitute a message for the spiritual health of humankind whether they are sick with liquor in a sick society, or sick without liquor in a sick society.” In the talk he gave before leaving his position as General Service Conference chair in 1956, Smith spoke movingly of “the humility with which anyone who is accorded anything that remotely resembles an honor in A.A....behaves.” It was a humility Bern Smith displayed every time he made a Conference speech.

Given Smith's focus on humility and the importance of A.A. functioning in group unity, it is perhaps inevitable that one of

Smith's most moving Conference talks is entitled “Group Conscience Guides A.A. to Right and Away from Wrong.” At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon of April 25, 1969, Smith stepped to the podium at New York City's Hotel Roosevelt, and said: “My name is Bernard Smith [and] I am still regarded as a nonalcoholic,” which brought a laugh from the assembled delegates—Smith would often joke about his continuing nonalcoholic status, as if he might be in danger of losing it at any moment.

Drawing more laughs, but launching into his topic for the evening, he went on to speak about the “paradoxes” embodied in A.A., one of which was “that this conference of men and women, more at home with their conscience in my opinion than any other possible aggregation of human beings, should call upon a lawyer to deliver an address on the stream of conscience.”

Conscience, as defined by Webster's, Smith said, was “the faculty, power or principle as in an individual nation or group that guides to the right and away from the wrong.”

Smith continued:

“Thus when we meet here this afternoon at a conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, we are collectively a group. Whenever indeed men and women within A.A. meet together, whether in their groups, and areas, and states, nationally or internationally, we are A.A. in action, bound by the group conscience; as we dedicate ourselves to a single purpose we find ourselves energized by a common need and dignified by human decency and devotion. Our conference, as all other conferences, is within the meaning of the group conscience directed to preserve and strengthen that which brought us recovery and to expand our services in the hope of bringing recovery to those who still live in the darkness and desolation that we once knew. Within the meaning of the group conscience it is the power in principles of this spiritually-based society that must guide us to the right and away from the wrong.”

Bernard Smith speaks of the group conscience as “the underlying strength” of A.A., and goes on to say: “we must never seek compromise but always certainty, we must never use the force of a scant majority to impose changes on minority.” This is an important and subtle distinction to make. A group conscience is not “majority rule”; rather it is the collective, thoughtful expression of the group. “Therefore,” Smith pointed out, ... “the group conscience [has] a deep and abiding responsibility to all of A.A. that no changes be made unless very nearly all of us are certain that we are being guided to the right and away from the wrong. Out of this flows the need ever to respect the views of a minority, for they too as individuals in relation to the group may well be guided to the right as they see it and away from the wrong.”

This distinction—sometimes ignored—is crucially important to the spiritual well-being of the A.A. group, be it a small home group or the Conference itself. Contrary to the popular saying, Smith said, the ends do not justify the means. “While sobriety is the end we seek, it is the means by which we attain sobriety that renders this fellowship so altogether unique.” He

This will be the final issue of *Markings* as a stand-alone newsletter. After some consideration this was decided in order to allocate resources in the Archives department better and more cost-effectively. In the future, *Box 4-5-9*, the G.S.O. bulletin, will occasionally publish articles related to A.A. archives and history with information provided by G.S.O. Archives.

goes on to quote Aldous Huxley: “The end cannot justify the means for the simple and obvious reason that the means employed determine the nature of the end produced.”

Good, long-lasting, spiritual sobriety—and group unity—is never produced, in other words, via procedures which threaten the sobriety or spiritual well-being of others in the group, for A.A. is not only about stopping drinking, but learning to live through what Smith calls: “the simple tenets of humility, honesty, devotion, love and compassion.”

Smith goes on to give examples of the group conscience at work within A.A. Bill W. talked numerous times about the power of the group during the early days—about how in 1937, he was convinced by New York A.A.s that taking a job as a paid alcoholism counselor and therapist at Towns Hospital would jeopardize the fledgling A.A. movement. Smith talks about the early days of the General Service Conference, and how the delegates decided to officially limit themselves to two year terms so that “the experience of serving as a conference delegate” be spread around as widely as possible. Somehow humorously, he also describes his own insistence, as chair of the 1953 Conference, that the name of the Alcoholic Foundation be changed to Alcoholics Anonymous International. The majority of delegates actually approved this change; but it was the minority that Smith listened to, the ones who felt that the name Alcoholics Anonymous International sounded too much like a “prideful” philanthropic organization or corporation. It was not “a name of humility,” and when Bill W. proposed the name “The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous,” the following year, Smith and the delegates gladly went along with changing it, understanding, as he put it, how “the views of the minority can become the views of the overwhelming majority.”

In closing his speech that evening, Bernard Smith looked back over the past eighteen years of Conferences and marveled: “In an age of divisiveness and fragmentation your fellowship has remained unified by its dedication to a common ideal as it is energized by a common need. Let the group conscience continue to guide your inspired fellowship so that it may do for others for all time what it has done for you.”

A little over a year later, on July 31, 1970, Bernard Smith was to die of a sudden heart attack at the age of 68. But not before he performed one more service for A.A. Because of illness, Bill W. was not able to make his speech at the Saturday night “Big Meeting” during the 1970 International Convention in Miami Beach. At the last minute, Bern Smith filled in for him and made a magnificent speech on the subject of “Unity and Continuity.”

After Smith died, Bill W.—ill himself with the emphysema that would take his life the following January—wrote:

From the very beginning, Bern Smith understood the spiritual basis upon which the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous rests. Such an understanding is rare among “outsiders.” But Bern never was an outsider—not really. He not only understood our Fellowship, he believed in it as well.

Just one month ago today, Bern made a remarkable and in-

spiring talk to some 11,000 of our members gathered in Miami Beach to celebrate our Fellowship’s thirty-fifth anniversary. The subject of his talk was Unity—truly an apt subject, for no man did more than he to assure Unity within our Fellowship.

Alcoholics Anonymous Celebrating 75 Years in Florida

Jacksonville had its first A.A. meeting at 2747 Riverside Ave. in the first week of January 1941, just four and a half years after Alcoholics Anonymous had its beginning in Akron, Ohio.

A Navy commander, Junius C., had been living in Pasadena, California, and trying to stay sober. Assigned to Jacksonville, and fearful that he might drink again, he and his wife sought help from a Dr. Bedell, a psychiatrist who had a private sanitarium in Jacksonville for treating alcoholics. Dr. Bedell introduced Junius to Tom S. who he had been treating for years as a hopeless alcoholic.

Junius and Tom met in December of 1940 at Junius’ base quarters. They talked for over two hours. Junius told his story to Tom and read passages from the Big Book. Circa January 6, 1941, Tom rounded up five of his drinking buddies and they had a meeting in a house that Tom rented from his aunt on Riverside Ave. Not everyone stayed sober, but in April of 1941 Tom S. went to the *Jacksonville Journal* and informed them of the A.A. movement and what they were doing locally. The resulting article caused three men to join the group.

The Northeast Florida Intergroup hosted a celebration of this first meeting on January 16, 2016, at the Central Group.

Austin A.A.’s 70th Birthday

A.A. started in Austin, Texas in 1945 with five alcoholics who were put in touch with each other through the help of a professional, Dr. Wade. They held their first A.A. meeting in a house on San Antonio Street.

To celebrate the 70th Anniversary, the Northland A.A. Group, one of the oldest groups in the city, hosted the First Annual Archives Open House. The event began with Ralph Y., a Northland oldtimer, who shared a little more of Austin’s history and of the formation of the Northland Group. James H., our SWTA past delegate, did a wonderful presentation on *Markings on the Journey*, a DVD highlighting A.A.’s growth in the U.S. and Canada over the past 80 years, and how it spread worldwide. Next, Rosi S., past SWTA Area Archives chair, did a great presentation on the History of A.A. in Austin, complete with accurate photos and verified documents from G.S.O. and from the Austin History Museum and other sources showing a timeline of our beginnings in the 1950s, the professionals who helped us, the original A.A. pioneers, meeting places, and more.

All in all, the Archives Open House was a great event in which to celebrate our past and strengthen our future vision for our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.