



MARKINGS

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YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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“PIGEON” by Father G.

Let's have a little respect for that word—"pigeon." As I understand the story, the term "pigeon", to refer to a newcomer in Alcoholics Anonymous, came from Dr. Bob, one of the two co-founders of A.A. It was Dr. Bob's habit of saying, "I must see the pigeon in 218", or "I have a pigeon coming tonight." Suppose I told you that Dr. Bob didn't pick that term, referring to heavy social drinkers, out of the air. The word, "pigeon", has a very good "lexicographical" standing.

From all accounts, Dr. Bob was a very light sleeper. He loved to read when he could not sleep. One of his favorites was H. L. Mencken. The gruff Baltimore newspaperman wrote "The American Language." It was first published in 1919, revised and supplemented several times. This book was a natural for a man of Dr. Bob's temperament and training. Mencken and Bob were the same age, both were witty, had contempt for shallowness and conceit. Mencken, always a heavy drinker, reserved some of his harshest words for those he called the Prohibitionists. He referred to the 18th Amendment in capital letters—"The Thirteen Years."

When Mencken reaches the words which he introduces as: "terms still used by American boozers," he waxes eloquent. You can see he knows his stuff. He notes, first, the words about drinking imported from England, then those which were homegrown on this side of the Atlantic. Mencken points out, correctly, that Benjamin Franklin was the first American who wondered why tavern habitués never referred to a patron as being drunk. They were "soused", "corned", or "stewed." The genius, Ben Franklin, who gave us the lightning rod, the bifocal lens, the fuel saving stove, good postal service, also gave A.A. its "pigeons."

Franklin addressed himself twice in

his lifetime to the subject of synonyms for the word—drunk. (The American Slang Dictionary claims that there are more synonyms for "drunk" than any other word in American speech.) Ben first wrote about it when he was learning the printer's trade in his home town of Boston. He was working under his older brother, James, who did not have too high an opinion of Ben's talents. The 16 year old teenager was forced to write articles under the pen name of "Ms. Silence Dogood", and slip them under the door of the printshop. James Franklin admired the letters and printed them until he discovered that Benjamin had written them.

The two brothers quarrelled constantly. The next year, Ben ran away to Philadelphia, then the largest city in the colonies. At age thirty, as a successful owner of the Pennsylvania Gazette, Franklin returned to his boyhood hobby. The Silence Dogood letter had only 19 expressions, now the Philadelphia newspaperman had collected 225 words referring to fuddled imbibers. He published "The Drinkers Dictionary" which amused H. L. Mencken immensely.

Some members of A.A. may take offense at being compared to the lowly pigeon, take heart, Dr. Bob, Mencken and Franklin could have made you a bear, bee, cat, fox, toad, goose, rat, dog (or puppy), or a sow. Franklin was descriptive. He claimed that compulsive drinkers "eat a toad and a half for breakfast" or they are "dizzy as a goose" or "as good conditioned as a puppy." The actual entry in Franklin's dictionary which Mencken quotes, says that people who hung around taverns referred to drunks as being "PIGEON-EYED". Dr. Bob, knowing English grammar very well, referred to anyone who was "pigeon-eyed" lovingly as being "his pigeon."

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SERIALLY... THE ARCHIVAL HANDBOOK CONCLUDED (PART IV)

How many Archival Centers are necessary, or desirable, in a given state or (third legacy) area?

Since it is recommended that an archival project be placed under the guidance of an Archives Committee, responsible in turn to the State or Area Committee, it would seem a function of the Archives Committee to make a judgment as to the number or repositories needed in a particular area. It is certainly important to invite the widest participation of all groups and individuals in the activity of collecting early history artifacts and memorabilia. In most areas, probably one center would be sufficient; in large states or locations, where there may be several very early A.A.—beginnings towns and cities, perhaps there ought to be more than one repository. The Archives Committee can best make that decision, agreeable to every group in the locality.

In writing up local histories, or providing correspondence which will be shared between area and G.S.O. archives, how should the anonymity of A.A. members be handled?

We are often asked by members if, in collecting and writing up their local or area history, full names should be used of group founders, early members or group officers, regardless of whether the manuscripts are to be retained in the area only, or are also intended for sharing with G.S.O. and other area archives. Development of procedures seems to be a matter for local policy decision by the Archives Committee, but the necessity for protecting the confidentiality of correspondence and the anonymity of correspondence is without question an important consideration and a trust that falls upon

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