EXCERPTS FROM “THE ARCHIVES” AT THE
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, SEATTLE - Part 2

Tom H.: “Perhaps you people are wondering how I got this job as moderator. Well, I kind of wonder myself sometimes, but it probably has something to do with the fact that I've been around a little bit for 34 years, 5 months and 29 days. No, no, at this kind of gathering all it means is that you are getting old. You know, I'd like to tell people just so you get some idea of where I'm coming from. I told my wife at my last birthday 'I don't think I look 70 do I?' she said 'No, you don't—but you used to.' We better move along. Here we've got another chap who has some very interesting information: Paul from California”:

“My name is Paul and I'm an alcoholic. Before I start, I just want to say that I am very grateful to Seattle for their hospitality and for G.S.O. for putting this function on, since this thing is being taped, for all of those who stayed at home to keep the flame burning, to make sure there is a place for alcoholics who are still suffering from alcoholism. Our Archival Committee began in the early 1980's. At that time, it was kind of an independent cowboy effort of a few interested people. The Archives Committee became part of San Diego Imperial Area Assembly. I was invited to participate at that time and was elected Chair of that committee. I did a lousy job so they re-elected me to get back at me. In true A.A. spirit, I might add and have been involved in it ever since. Right now the way our committee is set up it is staffed by G.S.R. and district committee members who are interested. Often, somebody gets pulled out for the Archives Committee and they say “But, I am not interested in the Archives Committee.” So I say “Tough, you're on the Archives Committee.” Kind of like the Conference I think, so that is kind of fun. I wanted to mention to people that I did bring along a booklet called “The Story of Alcoholics Anonymous in San Diego County. There is a whole box of them up here that our Archives Committee dutifully put together in the last week to bring here to make available to all of you. Please come up and take as many of them as you wish and consider it a teaser for the 1995 International Convention which is going to be in San Diego. One of the things that our Archives Committee has been actively doing is taping the memories of long-timers. They love it! They love finding someone who is interested in the old days who will sit down and take the time to listen to them ramble on and sometimes give excruciating detail about what happened in the old days of A.A. and you can chew up a lot of old tapes that way. That has been fun because the long-term members themselves are the best source of other long-term members. Very often as you know, as they get older, their health goes, and they stay home and they do not want to drive at night and they don't like the smoke and the language and the drug addicts and so forth. I think one of the reasons that I was specially interested in that kind of thing I was raised by my grandfather so I am sensitive, or like to think I am, to those who are two generations older than I am. I am just very interested in the generation of people who founded A.A. So I like old-timers I like older people and I like spending time with them. One of the other things we did was to start a “Roots” meeting. It is an annual gathering of long-term members of 30-40 years plus. We get about a half dozen of them up on stage to talk for about 10 minutes (continued on page 3)
The origins of the Group Conscience:

So Bob and I reflected that late afternoon in 1937. "Missionaries, a chain of drunk tanks, and a book." Well, even by then, he and I began to learn that we were not the government at A.A. He, I guess more than I, already realized that the conscience of the group opinion, and in the groups interest could be better than our own. We'd better consult the folks.

There was a dear old non-alcoholic (and his wife), T. Henry Williams, there in Akron. They'd let us meet in their house after it got out of the Smith's parlor and got into theirs. And he was a great friend of ours. So, we called a meeting of the Akron Group—that is to say those who had stayed sober over any great length of time. I think for this particular meeting we scraped up about eighteen. That evening, Bob and I told them that we were within sight of success, that we thought this thing might go on and on and on. That a new light was indeed shining in our dark world. But, how could this light be reflected and transmitted without being distorted and garbled. At this point he turned the meeting over to me and, being a salesman, I set right to work on them drunk tanks and subsidies for the missionaries—I was pretty poor then—and we touched on the book.

Not Well Received

The group conscience consisted of 18 men, good and true and good and true men you could see, right away, were damned skeptical about it all. Almost with one voice they choroused, "Let's keep it simple. This is going to bring money into this thing. This is going to create a professional class. We'll all be ruined." I countered, "That's a very good argument. Lots to what you say. But even within gunfire of this very house, alcoholics are dying like flies. If this thing doesn't move any faster than it has in the last three years, it may be another ten before it gets to the outskirts of Akron. How in God's name are we going to carry this message to others? We've got to take some kind of chance. We can't keep it so simple that it becomes an anarchy and becomes complicated. We can't keep it so simple that it won't propagate itself. And we've got to have a lot of money to do these things." Exerting myself to the utmost, which was considerate in those days, we finally got a vote in that little meeting and it was a mighty close vote. By just a majority of maybe two or three, the meeting said, with some reluctance "Well, Bill, if we need a lot of dough, you better go back to New York where there's plenty of it and you raise it."

The first search for money

Boy that was the word I'd been waiting for! So I scrambled back to the Great City and I began to approach some people of means, and describe this tremendous thing that had happened. It didn't seem so tremendous to the people of means at all. They said "What? 35 or 40 drunks sobered up. They have sobered up before now, you know. And besides, Mr. Wilson, don't you think it's kind of sweeping up the shavings? I mean, wouldn't something for the Red Cross be better?" In other words, with all of my most ardent solicitation, I got one hell of a freeze from the gentlemen of wealth.

Early despair

I began to get blue. And, when I begin to get blue, my stomach kicks up as well as other things. I was laying in the bed one night with an imaginary ulcer attack-used to have them all the time (I had one at the time the Twelve Steps were written) and I said, "My God, we're starving to death here on Clinton Street. By this time my house was full of drunks, they were eating us out of house and home. In those days we never believed in charging anybody for anything, so Lois was earning the money, I was being the missionary, the drunks were eating meals. "This can't go on! We've got to have them drunk tanks, we've got to have them missionaries, and we got to have a book—that's for sure."

Enter Leonard Strong

The next morning, I crawled into clothes, and I thought of my brother-in-law. He's a doctor. I went up to see my brother-in-law Leonard. He pried out a little time between patients coming in up there and I started my awful belly-aching about these rich guys who wouldn't give us any dough for the great and glorious enterprise.

Leonard's idea, Rockefeller

It seems that he knew a girl and I think she had an uncle that somehow was tied up with the Rockefeller family and their charities. "If you want to, we'll call up the man and if he's alive and will see us. Would you like me to do that?" I hadn't tried the Rockefeller offices, so I said "Well, sure, give them a ring." On what slender threads our destiny sometimes hangs. Remember, my brother-in-law said, "I knew a girl and I think she had an uncle."

Enter Willard Richardson

So, the call was made. Instantly there came on the other end of the wire the voice of dear Willard Richardson, one of the loveliest Christian gentlemen that I have ever known. And the moment he recognized my brother-in-law, he said "Why Leonard, where have you been all these years?" My brother-in-law—unlike me—is a man of very few words, so he quickly said to dear old "Uncle Willard" that he had a brother-in-law who had some success sobering up drunks and could the two of us come over there and see him. "Why certainly," said dear Willard, "come right over."

The First meeting at Rockefeller's

We go over to Rockefeller Plaza, we go up that elevator, 54 flights—56 I guess it is—and we walked punk into Mr. Rockefeller's personal offices. Asked to see Mr. Richardson and here sits this lovely benign old gentleman, who nevertheless had kind of a shrewd twinkle in his eyes. I sat down and told him about our exciting discovery, this terrific cure for alcoholics that had just hit the world, how it worked and what it had done for them. Boy, this was the first receptive man with money—or access to money—remember, we were in Mr. Rockefeller's personal offices at this (continued on page 4)
EXCERPTS continued

(continued from page 1)
each about the old days. Some of them laughed when they heard that
10 minute limit. I've had the privilege
ing of chairing that thing when everyone on the podium was sober longer than
I had been alive and I get to give the
hook the way Tommy does. Tommy
though just pulls on your coattails. I
have to stand up and literally elbow
them away from the microphone.
Anyway, that has created tremen-
dous interest and what has happened
is other long-term members will
come out of the woodwork to see
their cohorts. At one of them there
was a reunion of people who had not
seen each other for 35 years. Very
touching! You will have people ac-
tually bring archival things. We had
a guy bring in a copy of As Bill Sees
It, first edition, signed by the first
A.A. member in our county. We had
another guy bring in a bunch of old
stuff and he didn't know what it was.
Old meeting schedules, newspaper
clippings from the 50's and a copy of
Bill's monograph on Niacin. So that
has been very valuable for us. The
other thing that we also put together
is a display. One of the things we did
with our display was we got copies of
old Grapevine articles from San
Diego County. Just to let people know
that have been contributing to the
Grapevine from our area for a long
time. That reminds me I wanted to
ask Tom, do you have a subscription
to the Grapevine? Yes. Yes he says
okay, alright! The other thing that
may be of note to people is that our
first meeting was on November 7,
1940. It was brought to our area by
Hal S., a member who sobered up
in Los Angeles in 1939. We have his
copy of A.A. Comes of Age signed to
him by Bill W. that one of our past
degates who's sitting out here, got
us and graciously donated to the Ar-
chives. We have several first editions
of the Big Book. We have a first ed-
tion of the Twelve and Twelve. One
of the other interesting things about
our area is that Bill's mother lived in
San Diego for some time. So we have
some correspondence from her.
Another old A.A. member, Jim B.,
sobered up June of 1938 in New York
and founded A.A. in Philadelphia. He
became the agnostic noted in the
story “The Vicious Cycle” in the Big
Book and moved to San Diego in the
Late 1940's after 13-stepping his wife.
He lived in San Diego until his death
in September 1974 and his wife,
Rosa, died in May 1980. We have
some correspondence between Jim
and Bill from the late 40's about the
ideas batting around about getting a
General Service Conference started
and so forth and that has been
fascinating to see. We have some
wonderful, wonderful holdings and
one of the other things we did in

1990 HISTORY AND ACTIONS OF THE
TRUSTEES ARCHIVES COMMITTEE

The Gathering Experience Proposal
was approved for mailing in Mid-
February. A number of specific cor-
rections were made to the letter. It
was also suggested that more space
be allotted to the reply sections.
Some method for supplying
Canadian stamps for use by
respondents in that country will be
explored. Current and past Staff,
Trustees and Delegates will be polled
in this project. The subcommittee
reported their observations on the
suggestion to have a local archivist
selected to participate in trustee
Archives Committee meetings. The
cost, difficulty in selection and the
limited time of our meetings militated
against such participation. Present
input of local archivists appear ade-
quate through correspondence and
Markings, the archival newsletter.
The subcommittee recommended
that we prepare a biannual letter and
questionnaire addressed to the needs
of this body. A draft will be ready
for the October meeting. A simpli-
fied wording for our Classifications used
for our holdings was presented and
approved. The following are changed:

General (material open to the public)
will now be classified ‘A’.

General material (available to A.A.
members, under controlled condi-
tions, with review and approval of
the Archives Committee) is now
classified B.

Confidential material (not available
to anyone for a specific time period
or under special conditions) is now
classified “D”.

The Committee reviewed our policy
gainst the use of video tapes of early
timers for oral histories. The commit-
tee reaffirmed its' belief that such use
would violate the letter and spirit of
our 11th and 12th Traditions. Conse-
sequently, it was voted not to accept
the video tape but to request again
an audio copy thereof. The delegate
Bobby B. would be asked to facilitate
this request.

The Archives will copy 2 sets of
minutes from the Conference, Trustee
and Corporate Committees on ar-
chival paper.

The distribution of the Washing-
tonian paper by Milton Maxwell
within the fellowship was reviewed. It
was agreed that the trustees’ Ar-
chives Committee would continue to
send the delegates and trustees
copies every other year. Others would
be encouraged to send a S9* con-
tribution to cover duplication and
postage. (*changed to $10 by
A.A.W.S.) It was decided that the
main item on the January agenda
would be a discussion of what role of
the G.S.O. Archives could and should
be in the years ahead.

February was we had a thing called
“The Celebration of A.A. History” in
the area. One of the things we did
was to tape a member who knew Bill.
Actually, her good friend was Bill's
sister Dorothy and she remembers
Dorothy complaining to her about
her drunken brother Bill. So she's
been around a long time and later
joined A.A. herself. We got to get her
to reminisce on the tape a bit about
how one of her sisters married
Clarence and another sister married
Hank P. One of the things she
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THE BIG BOOK continued

(continued from page 2)
moment-and by now, too, we had
learned that this was Mr. Rocke-
feller's closest personal friend. He
said, "Why, yes, I'm much inter-
ested. Would you like to have lunch
with me, Mr. Wilson?" Now you know, for
a rising promoter, that sounded
pretty good-going to have lunch with
the best friend of John D. Things were
looking up. My ulcer attack
disappeared.

Spirits high, the lunch
with Richardson
I had lunch with the old gentleman
and boy, he's so warm and kind and
friendly. Right at the close of lunch
he said, 'Why now, Mr. Wilson-or Bill,
if I can call you that-wouldn't you like
to have a larger meeting with some
of my friends? There's Frank Amos,
he's in the advertising business, but
he was on a committee that recom-
mended Mr. Rockefeller drop the Pro-
hibition business. And there's Leroy
Chipman, he looks after Mr.
Rockefeller's real estate. There's Mr.
Scott, he's Chairman of the Board up
at the Riverside Church.

The next meeting at
Rockefeller's
A meeting was arranged and it fell
upon a winter's night in late 1937.
The meeting was at thirty Rockefeller
Plaza. We called in-post haste-a cou-
ple of drunks from Akron-Smithy in-
cluded of course. I came in with the
New York contingent-four or five. To
our astonishment, we were ushered
into Mr. Rockefeller's personal board
room-right next to his office. I
thought to myself, 'Well now this is
really getting hot.' Indeed I felt very
much warmed when I was told by Mr.
Richardson that I was sitting in the
very chair that was just vacated by
Mr. Rockefeller. I said, "Well now, we
are really getting close to the bank
roll." Old Dr. Silkworth was there
that night too. He testified what he
had seen happen to these new friends
of ours. And these drunks-thinking of
nothing better to say-each of us told
our stories-the drinking and the
recovery. And these folks listened.
They seemed very definitely impres-
sed. So, I could see that the moment
for the big touch was coming. I
gingerly brought up the subject of
drunk tanks, the subsidized mis-
ionaries and this question of a book
or literature.

To Be Continued

EXCERPTS continued

(continued from page 3)
donated to the G.S.O. is a first edi-
tion, first printing of the Big Book
with signatures of the first hundred
members and T. Henry and Clarence
Williams, Dr. Tiebout and all those
people. One of the things I wanted to
mention was a very poignant thing for
us. We went through quite an uproar
about posthumous anonymity in our
committee and our committee has af-
firmed a concept of what posthumous
anonymity is about. We continue to
respect posthumous anonymity. We
don't believe in publishing the last
names of dead A.A. members in our
history. We believe that it confuses
newer A.A. members about that and
we see no particular mileage in doing
that and we see it as unnecessary.
Finally, I wanted to mention a line
from a 1960 letter from Bill to Jimmy
that we have a copy of. In it, Jimmy
complained evidently that some of
the old-timers were ignored at Long
Beach in 1960 and Jimmy of course,
just being 100 miles south couldn't
understand why he wasn't given a big-
ger whoopla. Bill replied 'You know
Jim, you may complain rightly that
you suffer from too little recognition,
but, I can say with equal fervor that
I suffer from far too much.' Thank
you.'

To Be Continued

Center of picture shows the Big Book display case with 1st, 2nd and 3rd addi-
tions inside. Not shown are several 12x12's that can also be displayed. Large
red placard on the left is replica of 1st addition Big Book, made by a Member
of the Fellowship. Blue placard on the right is replica of 3rd addition.
Submitted by Herb B., So. Minnesota Area Archives