An Illustrated Timeline of AA History

(If the Group wants to use its format let the local chair open the meeting) Open with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

My name is ________ and I am an alcoholic. Welcome everyone. (Introduce members of the Archives Committee)

AA Members seem to have a warm place in their hearts for AA history. Perhaps it’s because our stories define our own history when we disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened and what we are like now. The AA Fellowship has a very strong verbal tradition. Much information is passed on by word of mouth. This has both its good and difficult sides. How do you know what is fact and what is myth? Much effort has been taken to ensure that what is presented to you has been verified in one or more reliable written reference sources.

In order to more accurately relate the past to the present, we will also use Consumer Price Index (or CPI) conversion factors to convert past dollar amounts to today’s dollar values (i.e. the dollars needed today to equal the purchasing power of the values converted). For example, $3.50 was needed in 1939 to purchase the Big Book. That would be equal to $46 today.
Conference-Approved Materials

There is a wealth of AA literature and media containing AA history. AA is rather remarkable in the amount of history it has published about the AA Fellowship and the gifts of AA’s three Legacies.

Materials include:

Books, manuals, scrapbooks & GSC reports from AAWS & GSO.
Conference-approved pamphlets.
Video & audio cassettes from AAWS and the Grapevine.
AA Grapevine publications.
*Markings* newsletter & AA History timeline at *aa.org*.

Some of the sources are shown in the illustration. There are many more. Also there are quite a few reputable scholarly works about AA.
The Three Legacies of AA

This presentation is about the 3 Legacies of AA which are: Recovery, whose spiritual principles are the 12 Steps, Unity whose spiritual principles are the 12 Traditions & Service whose spiritual principles are the 12 Concepts. The circle and triangle symbol of the 3 Legacies often appears on chips and medallions.

This presentation focuses on the question of “How did the 3 legacies of AA come to be?” They have a fascinating history. The common root of the 3 Legacies might surprise you. It stems from an action that took place in November 1937. That action was the decision to write a book of AA experience. That book came to be known as the “Big Book.”

The history of how the 3 Legacies of AA evolved will be presented in a timeline sequence. As an introduction, let’s go back in time to see how certain words we are familiar with came into being. We will also discuss a fellowship that had the chance to be what AA is today but did not fulfill its promise. Additionally, we will cover some of the early influences of AA’s friends in religion and medicine.
Origin of the Word “Alcohol”

The word “alcohol” goes far back in history and comes from the Arabic word “al-kuhul” denoting a substance called “kohl” which was a fine powder of antimony used as an eye makeup. The word originally meant any fine powder. The alchemists of medieval Europe later applied it to essences obtained by distillation and this led to the current usage. It was not until the 18th century that the word “alcohol” came to designate the intoxicating ingredient in liquor.

During the late 1700’s and early 1800’s, problem drinking in America became such an enormous national problem that it gave birth to thousands of temperance societies.
The Washington Temperance Society - April 1840

In April 1840, six drinking friends in Baltimore, MD formed the “Washington Temperance Society.” They later became known as the “Washingtonians.” Their early growth was extremely rapid but it peaked after about 7 years.

The Washingtonians required a pledge of total abstinence and attendance at weekly meetings where members would relate their stories of drunkenness and recovery. As a body, they recognized no religion or creed, they were politically neutral and each member was supposed to help alcoholics who were still drinking.

Enthusiastic support of their activities came from many temperance societies due to the success the Washingtonians had in mobilizing public attention to the damages of alcoholism.

Over the following years, Washingtonian membership evolved to consist primarily of non-alcoholic temperance advocates and a large number of adolescents (who were under age 15). Washingtonian membership reached several hundred thousand but the number of alcoholics in the mix was likely well under 150,000.

As the membership makeup changed, sentiments shifted away from reforming (or helping) alcoholics, to pursuing a legal means of prohibiting alcohol. Washingtonian practices came to be viewed as outmoded and interest in them faded. There was no sudden or massive collapse. They simply faded out of existence over time.
Some claim that issues such as Washingtonian involvement in religion, politics and abolition of slavery led to their downfall. While there were some incidents of this, there is not much compelling evidence to support the conclusion that it played any significant role in the Washingtonian’s downfall.

The root cause of the Washingtonian’s downfall appears to be their major departure from their original membership makeup (of all alcoholics) and their major departure from their original primary purpose (of one alcoholic trying to help another alcoholic).

It’s a powerful lesson on the importance of AA’s Traditions.
Origin of the Word “Alcoholism” - Dr Magnus Huss - 1849

In 1849, Swedish physician Magnus Huss coined the words “alcoholism” and “alcoholic” to denote both the action of alcohol on the human system, and the diseased condition produced by alcohol. He noted that chronic alcoholism consisted of a repetitive intake of alcohol to an extent that caused repeated or continual harm to the drinker, which may be physical, mental, social or economic. It took nearly a century for these new terms to achieve widespread usage in America.

Origin of the Term “Skid Row” - 1852

The term “skid row” originated in 1852 from a section of Seattle, WA. A sawmill built in Pioneer Square near Puget Sound used skids (or tracks of peeled logs) to get the timber to the mill. The area became home to vagrants and destitute alcoholics. It was known first as “Skid Road” and later as “Skid Row.”
Jerry McAuley and the Urban Mission Movement - 1872

In 1872, Jerry McAuley opened the Water St Mission in the 4th Ward of NYC. This was the first rescue mission in the US and it started the urban mission movement. The movement was spread across America by the Salvation Army and focused its message to Skid Row alcoholics.

McAuley died in 1884 and was succeeded by Samuel Hopkins Hadley. Hadley’s example of recovery from alcoholism is cited in William James’ book “The Varieties of Religious Experience.” Hadley’s son, Harry, later joined with the Rev Sam Shoemaker to start a rescue mission at Calvary Episcopal Church in NYC.

The rescue mission was the place from which a newly sober Ebby T carried a message of recovery to Bill W. Harry Hadley was in charge of Calvary Mission when a newly sober Bill W (fresh out of Towns Hospital) visited the mission seeking alcoholics to work with.
Franchises and “Miracle Cures” – 1880

In the late 1800’s, businesses offering so-called alcoholism “cures” grew at a prolific rate. In many cases the remedy they prescribed was far more dangerous than what it was supposed to fix.
Some of these unregulated businesses became so popular that they grew into what we would today call “franchises” or “chains.” Two prominent chains were the Keeley Institute and the Gatlin Institute. Between 1880 and 1920, more than 500,000 alcoholics and addicts took the Keeley Cure (which was praised by some as a cure of miraculous potential and at the same time attacked by others as a fraud).
These early businesses evolved into what we today call “treatment centers.” They had their trial and error learning period in their early days just like AA.
Charles B Towns Hospital -1901

A familiar name in AA history is that of Charles B towns. In 1901, the Charles B Towns Hospital for Drug and Alcohol Addictions opened in NYC. It was a private “drying out” hospital for the affluent. Hospital fees had to be paid in advance or be guaranteed. Treatment fees for alcoholism ran from $75 to $150 ($1,560 to $3,120 today) in the main hospital and $50 ($1,040 today) for treatment in the hospital annex. The annex was for patients of “moderate means.”

Towns made a name for himself, and his hospital, with his patronage of the nationally prominent physician, and Cornell U professor, Alexander Lambert. Towns hospital also provided AA history with a physician who came to be known as “the Little Doctor who loved Drunks.” That was Dr William D Silkworth (a neurologist). Dr Silkworth joined the Towns Hospital staff in 1930 after losing his investments and savings in the stock market crash.

Towns was described as a man who radiated vitality. He had no medical background but was a national leader and reformer in the area of treatment of alcohol and drug addiction. Originally, Towns did not see eye to eye with Dr Silkworth on perceiving alcoholism as an illness. However, Towns played a very significant role in providing financial support to develop the Big Book. He also helped arrange much favorable publicity for AA in its early years.
Rev Frank N D Buchman - July 1908

In mid-1908, Frank Buchman arrived in England to attend the Keswick Convention of Evangelicals. After hearing a sermon by a woman evangelist, Jessie Penn-Lewis, he experienced a profound spiritual surrender and later helped another attendee go through the same experience. Returning to the US, he began what he called his “laboratory years” working out principles he later applied on a global scale in a movement he initially called the “First Century Christian Fellowship” and then, in the 1920’s, renamed to the “Oxford Group.”

Rev Samuel Moor Shoemaker - January 1918

In early 1918, Sam Shoemaker met Frank Buchman in Peking China and had a spiritual conversion experience. He became a devoted member of Buchman’s movement. Shoemaker became rector of the Calvary Episcopal Church in NYC in 1925 and later became the US leader of the Oxford Group.
Prohibition - January 1919

The 18th amendment to the US Constitution, prohibiting alcohol, was ratified on January 16, 1919. On May 19 of that year, Congress passed the Volstead (or National Prohibition) Act over President Wilson’s veto. Terms such as “bootlegger” “speakeasy” and “bathtub gin” entered the national vocabulary.

Both Bill W and Dr Bob did the worst of their drinking at a time when alcohol was illegal in the US.
Core Principles of the Oxford Group - 1922

Frank Buchman worked mostly in Princeton, Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Students responded to his approach and were ordained ministers. Others gave all their time to working with him. His movement, now called the Oxford Group, received wide international publicity in the 1920’s and 30’s.

Core principles of the Oxford Group consisted of:

4 ASOLUTES - Honesty, Unselfishness, Purity and Love
&
5 C’s - Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion and Continuance
&
5 Procedures - 1) Give in to God, 2) Listen to God’s Direction, 3) Check Guidance, 4) Restitution (or amends) & 5) Sharing for Witness and Confession.

The Oxford Group gave AA the term “Sharing.” They were also strong advocates of one member working with another. Dr Bob wrote that this was a key part of the message carried to him by Bill W when they first met. The Oxford Group gave AA the bulk of the spiritual principles embodied in the 12 Steps.

This was acknowledged in a July 1949 letter from Bill W to Sam Shoemaker. Bill later expressed regret that he did not write to Frank Buchman as well. One thing the Oxford Group did *not* have was Steps. Sometimes people will say there were 6 Steps of the Oxford Group. That is not factual. It was the alcoholics only (the “alcoholic squad” in NY and Akron) that had, and practiced, Steps.
Black Tuesday - October 29, 1929

The Stock Market collapsed on October 28 and 29, 1929. Contrary to myth, people did not jump out of office windows when their fortunes were lost. Because of the crash, Bill W was broke and $60,000 in debt ($645,000 today). He and his benefactor, Frank Shaw, parted company.

A short time later, Bill’s friend, Dick Johnson, offered him a job in Montreal, Canada with Greenshields and Co. By Christmas, Bill and Lois were in Canada living lavishly in a furnished apartment in Mount Royal overlooking Montreal. They had a new Packard automobile and membership in a Country Club.

In less than 10 months after arriving in Montreal, Bill was fired from Greenshields and Co (due to his drinking and fighting in the country club). Lois went back to Brooklyn - her mother had fallen ill. Bill stayed in Montreal to clean up details.

In December, after a binge that started in Montreal and carried him into VT, Lois went to get Bill. They returned to Lois’ parents home at 182 Clinton St. and moved into a room there. Lois’ mother, terminally ill with bone cancer, passed away on Christmas day. Bill, drunk for days before, could not attend the funeral and he stayed drunk for many days after.
“First in the chain of events that led to the founding of AA” - 1931

In 1931, Rowland Hazard (age 50) was treated by Dr Carl Gustav Jung in Zurich, Switzerland. It is believed that Rowland was a patient for about a year, sobered up and then returned to drinking.

Treated a second time by Jung, Rowland was told that there was no medical or psychological hope for an alcoholic of his type; that his only hope was a vital spiritual or religious experience - in short a genuine conversion experience.

Bill W wrote that this was “the first in the chain of events that led to the founding of AA.” Rowland sobered up in the Oxford Group and was a prominent member of Calvary Episcopal Church in NYC (the Oxford Group US HQ). He later moved to Shaftsbury, VT.

Bill W later wrote to Dr Jung on January 23, 1961, acknowledging his contribution to the AA movement. Jung replied to Bill on January 30. Bill wrote again to Dr Jung, however, Jung suffered a stroke and passed away on June 6, 1961.

The letters Bill and Dr Jung exchanged were printed in the Grapevine and are preserved in the book “The Language of the Heart.”
The Oxford Group in Akron, OH - 1931 and 1933

Russell (Bud) Firestone from Akron, OH was the alcoholic son of Akron business tycoon Harvey Firestone Sr. In 1931, Bud was introduced to the Rev Sam Shoemaker (the Oxford Group leader in the US). Bud, who was drinking a fifth or more of whiskey a day, spiritually surrendered with Shoemaker and was released from his alcohol obsession.

In January 1933, Harvey Firestone Sr (grateful for the help given to his son Bud) funded an Oxford Group conference at Akron’s Mayflower Hotel. Firestone and the Rev Walter Tunks met Frank Buchman and his team at the train station.

The event was widely publicized and it attracted some notable names in AA history which included: Henrietta Sieberling, T Henry and Clarace Williams and Anne Smith. Anne began attending Oxford Group meetings with her friend Henrietta Sieberling and later persuaded Dr Bob to attend.
Bill W’s First Treatment at Towns Hospital - 1933

In the Autumn of 1933, Lois W turned in desperation to her brother-in-law Dr Leonard V Strong. He arranged, and paid for, Bill’s first admission to Towns Hospital. Dr Strong was married to Bill’s sister Dorothy.

Bill was subjected to something called the “belladonna cure.” The regimen was fairly brutal and involved much “purging and puking” aided by, among other things, castor oil. Belladonna, a hallucinogen, was used to ease the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.
Prohibition Repealed - 1933

On December 5, 1933, the 21st amendment to the US Constitution was ratified repealing the 18th amendment. The almost decade and a half prohibition of alcohol was widely disregarded and yielded fortunes for organized crime in bootlegging and smuggling.

Dr Bob mentions in his Big Book story that it was around this time (what he called “the beer experiment”) that he joined the Oxford Group.
Ebby T and the Oxford Group - 1934

In July 1934, Ebby T was approached in Manchester, VT by his friends Cebra G and Shep C. Both were Oxford Group members who did considerable drinking with Ebby but were abstaining from drinking. They informed Ebby of the Oxford Group in VT but Ebby was not quite ready yet to stop drinking.

In August 1934, Cebra and Shep vacationed at Rowland H’s house in VT and learned that Ebby might be committed to an asylum. Rowland and Cebra attended Ebby’s trial and persuaded the judge (who just happened to be Cebra's father, Collins) to parole Ebby to their custody. Rowland took Ebby to NYC to sober up with the help of the Oxford Group at the Calvary Rescue Mission. In late November 1934, Ebby heard about Bill’s drinking problem and phoned Lois who invited him over for dinner. Ebby visited Bill and shared his recovery experience in the Oxford Group.

Ebby later returned with Shep C and they both spoke to Bill about the Oxford Group. Lois recalled Ebby visited several times, once staying for dinner.
Prior to Ebby’s November visit, Bill went to Towns Hospital in July for the second time. Dr Silkworth explained the obsession and allergy of alcoholism but Bill started drinking again immediately upon discharge. Bill was unemployable, $50,000 in debt ($675,000 today) suicidal and drinking around the clock.

In September, Bill entered Towns Hospital for the third time. Dr Silkworth pronounced him as hopeless and told Lois that Bill would likely have to be committed. Bill left the hospital a very broken, frightened man. Sheer terror kept him sober but on November 11, he got drunk and severely injured. Lois began looking for sanitariums and asylums to place Bill.

After Ebby’s visits in late November, and after a drunken visit to Calvary Mission, Bill returned to Towns Hospital for the fourth time on December 11, 1934 and had his last drink (4 bottles of beer purchased on the way).

Ebby visited Bill in the hospital and explained the Oxford Group principles to him. After Ebby left, Bill fell into a deep depression (what he later called his “deflation at depth”) and had a profound spiritual experience (sometimes called his “white flash” or “hot flash” experience). Bill called Dr Silkworth to ask if he had gone crazy. Silkworth assured him he had not and told Bill to hang on to what he had because it seemed so much better than what he came into the hospital with. It is not well known, but Dr Silkworth was a very strong believer in the importance of spiritual experience in recovery.
The Oxford Group in New York - 1934

On December 15, Ebby gave Bill W, a copy of William James’ book “The Varieties of Religious Experience.” It deeply inspired Bill by revealing 3 key points for recovery:

1st) Calamity or complete defeat in a vital area of life (or what we call “hitting bottom”)

2nd) Admission of defeat (or what we call “acceptance”) and

3rd) Appeal to a higher power for help (or what we call “surrender”).

These key points are also the basis for Steps 1, 2, and 3. The book “The Varieties of Religious Experience” strongly influenced early AA and is cited in the Big Book.

Bill W left Towns Hospital. He and Lois began attending Oxford Group meetings with Ebby T, Shep C and Rowland H in Calvary Hall at Calvary House. Bill W worked with alcoholics at the Calvary Mission and Towns Hospital, emphasizing his “hot flash” spiritual experience.
Alcoholic Oxford Group members began meeting at his home on Clinton St. They would also meet after Oxford Group meetings at Stewart’s Cafeteria near the mission.

Bill’s Work With Alcoholics - Early 1935

In early 1935, Bill worked with alcoholics at the Calvary Mission and Towns Hospital, emphasizing his hot flash experience. Alcoholic Oxford Group members also began meeting at his home on 182 Clinton St. After about 6 months, Bill was very discouraged that he had no success sobering up others (however, his wife Lois reminded him that HE was staying sober because of his working with others).

Meanwhile, in March 1935, at the urging of her friend Delphine Weber, Henrietta Sieberling organized a Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T Henry and Clarace Williams’ home in Akron, OH. The meeting was started specifically to help Dr Bob with his drinking. Bob eventually openly admitted his drinking problem but could not bring himself to stop drinking.

In April 1935, Bill W had a talk with Dr Silkworth who advised him to stop preaching about his hot flash experience and hit the alcoholics hard with the medical view on alcoholism. Dr Silkworth advised Bill to break down the strong egos of alcoholics by telling them about the obsession
that condemned them to drink and allergy that condemned them to go mad or die. It would then be so much easier to get them to accept the spiritual solution.

**Akron’s Mayflower Hotel -May 1935**

In April 1935, Bill W returned to Wall St and was introduced to Howard Tompkins of the firm Baer and Co. Tompkins was involved in a proxy fight to take over control of the National Rubber Machinery Co. based in Akron, OH.

Bill W went to Akron in May 1935 to lead the stock proxy fight but it was quickly lost. In poor spirits, and tempted to enter the Mayflower Hotel bar, Bill telephoned clergy members listed on the hotel lobby directory.

The Rev Walter Tunks referred Bill to Norman Sheppard who, in turn, referred him to Henrietta Sieberling. She viewed Bill’s arrival as the answer to her prayers and called Anne Smith to arrange a dinner at her home the next day with Dr Bob.

Note: “AA Comes of Age” (pg 67) states that when Henrietta called Anne, Dr Bob was passed out under the kitchen table. It’s not true -he was upstairs in bed (and says so in his Big Book story, “Dr Bob’s Nightmare,” pg. 179). Bill appears to have said what he did, at the 1955 International Convention, for good-natured humor and not for fact.
Mothers Day -1935

On May 12, 1935, Mother’s Day, Bill W (age 39) met Dr Bob (age 55) for the first time at Henrietta Sieberling’s gatehouse at the Stan Hywet Hall estate. Dr Bob was too hung over from the day before to eat dinner and planned to stay only 15 minutes. Privately, in the library, Bill told Bob of his alcoholism experience as suggested by Dr Silkworth. Bob opened up and he and Bill talked until after 11PM. Dr Bob’s 15 minutes turned into 6 hours.

Henrietta Sieberling arranged for Bill to stay at the Portage Country Club. Later in May, Bill W wrote to Lois saying that he and Dr Bob tried in vain to sober up a Dr M whose wife had committed suicide and who was described as a “once prominent surgeon who developed into a terrific rake and drunk.”

In early June, Bill W moved to Dr Bob’s house at the request of Anne Smith. Bill insisted on keeping 2 bottles of liquor in the kitchen to prove that he and Bob could live in the presence of liquor. They went to Oxford Group meetings on Wednesday nights at the home of T Henry and Clarace Williams.
Dr Bob’s Last Binge -Early June 1935

Dr Bob, off the booze for about a month, left Akron by train to attend a week-long AMA convention in Atlantic City, NJ. He started drinking soon after boarding the train and continued binging and blacking out at the convention for 2 or 3 days.

Bill and Anne Smith received a call to come pick up a very drunken Dr Bob at his office nurse’s home. Bill helped Dr Bob through 3 days of sobering up to get ready for a scheduled surgery. On the day of the surgery, Bill gave Dr Bob his last drink (a beer) and a “goofball” (a barbiturate).

Dr Bob’s sobriety date is June 10, 1935. Bill W’s sobriety date is December 11, 1934. The beginning of the Fellowship of AA is celebrated on the day that the 2nd alcoholic (Dr Bob) had his last drink. This constituted 2 alcoholics coming together for the purpose of sobriety. As such, and in what would later become one of the key principles in the long form of Tradition Three, the first AA group, Akron #1, was born.

Dr Bob suggested that he and Bill W work with other alcoholics. A local Minister, J C Wright, provided a prospect who was quite a character. Bill and Bob tried in vain, throughout the summer, to sober up Edgar (Eddie) R (described as an “alcoholic atheist and able to produce a major crisis of some sort about every other day”).
Eddie R missed the chance to be AA #3 but he showed up at Dr Bob’s funeral in 1950. He was sober a year and attending the Youngstown, OH group. Another classic case of two members who did not make it at first during the summer and fall of 1935, are mentioned in the book “Dr Bob and the Good Oldtimers” (pg 97). They have become part of AA folklore. A man whose alias name is given as “Victor” and who was a former mayor of Akron, OH, and a woman whose alias name is given as “Lil” teamed up to claim the dubious honor of providing AA with the notion that would later come to be called the “13th Step.”

All kidding aside, it should be remembered that AA of the early years went after nothing but the toughest of tough cases of alcoholism - people who were typically considered hopeless and beyond all help.

Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three - Late June 1935

In late June 1935, Bill W, Dr Bob and Eddie R visited Bill D at City Hospital. A prominent attorney, Bill D was hospitalized 8 times in 1935 for his drinking. It took 5 days before Bill D would say that he could not control his drinking. He checked out of the hospital on July 4, 1935 and never drank again.

Bill D’s Big Book story is “Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three.” The story did not appear either in the original manuscript or the 1st edition Big Book. The reasons for this
are not clear.

Bill D was Ohio’s Panel 1 Delegate to the 1st General Service Conference in 1951.

The Principle of Group Conscience - December 1936

In August 1935, Bill W returned to NYC. Meetings were held at his house at 182 Clinton St on Tuesday nights. Over time, Bill was criticized by the NY Oxford Group members for working only with alcoholics. In Akron, T Henry and Clarace Williams were also criticized by Oxford Group members who did not support their efforts with alcoholics. The Oxford Group was out to save the world and sought out famous public figures to join their ranks for the publicity it would generate. Bill simply was out to save some nameless drunks.

In December 1936, Charles Towns offered Bill W a very lucrative job at his hospital as a lay alcoholism therapist. After years of living a hand to mouth existence, Bill wanted it very much.

The question was presented to the NY group meeting in Bill’s home. They rejected it and Bill complied with their decision. This was the emergence of the Tradition 2 principle of “God speaking in the group conscience is to be our final authority.”
Hospitals, Paid Missionaries and a Book of Experience - November 1937

In the late spring of 1937, Oxford Group leaders at the Calvary Mission ordered alcoholics staying there not to attend meetings at Clinton St. Bill and Lois were increasingly described as “not maximum” (an Oxford Group term for those lagging in devotion to Oxford Group principles). In August 1937, Bill and Lois stopped attending Oxford Group meetings and the NY AAs separated from the Oxford Group.

Later, in November 1937, Bill and Dr Bob met in Akron, OH and compared notes. 40 cases were sober (more than 20 of them for over a year). All had once been diagnosed as hopeless. Bill had ideas for a chain of hospitals, paid missionaries and a book of experience to carry the message to distant places. Dr Bob liked the book idea but was “frankly dubious” of the hospitals and the paid missionaries.

In a meeting at T Henry Williams’ home, Bill's ideas, for a book, hospitals and how to expand the movement with paid missionaries, narrowly passed by 2 votes among 18 members (actually it was a single vote that made the difference). The NY group was more enthusiastic. As mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, this humble group conscience decision would be the seed that grew into AA’s 3 Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.

The book project required financing and organization to
bring it to completion. Bill and NY member Hank P, tried to raise money without success. In December 1937, Bill’s brother-in-law, Dr Leonard V Strong, set up a meeting with Willard S Richardson who was the manager of John D Rockefeller Jr’s philanthropies. A second meeting was held and Richardson’s associate, Frank Amos, was asked to investigate the fledgling AA Fellowship.

**Fund Raising for the Book -1938**

On February 1, 1938, Frank Amos visited Akron, OH and later made a very favorable report back to Willard Richardson. Richardson recommended to John D Rockefeller Jr that he donate $50,000 ($650,000 today) to the Fellowship.

Rockefeller declined to make the donation but did provide $5,000 ($65,000 today) to be held in a fund at the Riverside Church. The fund was used to pay off Dr Bob’s mortgage and provide Bill and Bob with $30 a week ($390 today) as long as it lasted.

XXX
Beginning of the Writing of the Big Book - April 1938

In April 1938, the writing of the Big Book began at Hank P’s office at Honors Dealers, 17 William St, Newark, NJ. During 1938, Bill wrote and rewrote drafts at home on legal pads then dictated them to Ruth Hock (who was the Honors Dealers Secretary). Unfortunately, very few of the drafts survive today. Most were discarded in a later move from William St to Vesey St in NYC. A particularly difficult loss to AA’s archives is the draft page containing the initial version of the Twelve Steps.

Each week, Bill would first read what he had written to those who gathered to meet at his home on Tuesday evenings. After making changes, he sent the edited drafts to Dr Bob for further review and editing by the Akron members. As Bill worked his way through the explanatory chapters of the basic text, NY and Akron members wrote the personal stories that would be included in the book.
Dr Silkworth’s Letter -July 27, 1938
In July 1938, Dr Silkworth wrote a letter of support for use in fundraising for the book. It was later incorporated into the Big Book chapter “The Doctor’s Opinion.”
Dr Esther Richards of Baltimore was the one who suggested to Bill W to “get a number one physician in the alcoholism field to write an introduction.”

The Alcoholic Foundation -August 11, 1938
In August 1938, the Alcoholic Foundation was created as a charitable trust with a board of 5 Trustees. The board composition began a long (and later troublesome) tradition of making non-alcoholics a majority.
Non-alcoholic trustees were Willard Richardson (who proposed the Foundation) Frank Amos and John Wood (an attorney). Alcoholic trustees were Dr Bob and NY member Bill R who was the first Chairman of the Board (the actual title used at the time, and up to 1955, was President). Bill R, whose Big Book story is “A Business Man’s Recovery” returned to drinking and had to resign in February 1939.
An advisory committee to the board was also established. It consisted of A LeRoy Chipman, Bill W, Albert L Scott and Hank P. At this time, a
menacing cloud was arising in Europe and Asia. Nations of the world armed and mobilized for the coming of World War II. In response to the growing crisis, Frank Buchman called for a “moral and spiritual re-armament” to address the root causes of the conflict. He renamed the Oxford Group to “Moral Re-Armament” (MRA).

Works Publishing Co - September 1938
In September 1938, Frank Amos had Bill W meet Eugene Exman of Harper & Brothers. Exman offered Bill an advance of $1,500 ($19,000 today) on rights to the book. The Board urged acceptance. Instead, Hank P and Bill formed Works Publishing Co.

Nell Wing, AA’s first Archivist, later wrote, “If it wasn’t for Bill W the Big Book would never have been written. If it wasn’t for Hank P it never would have been published.” Hank’s Big Book story is “The Unbeliever.” He is also credited with writing the Big Book’s chapter 10 titled “To Employers.”

Hank and Bill sold Works Publishing Co stock at $25 par value ($325 today). Of 600 shares issued: Hank and Bill got 200 shares each. 200 shares were sold to others. Later, 30 shares of preferred stock at $100 par value ($1,300 today) were sold.

Dr Silkworth encouraged Charles Towns to loan $2,500 for the book. He later increased it to $4,000 (the equivalent of
The 6 Steps - Prior to December 1938

Prior to the writing of the Big Book, the recovery program consisted of 6 Steps, which were passed on to new members by word of mouth. Bill increased these to 12 Steps with the intention of adding clarity and closing loopholes that the alcoholics were wiggling through.

A version of the 6 Steps is shown in the illustration as Bill W recalled them in 1953. There are three differing versions of the early 6 Steps recorded in AA Literature. They can be found in the books “The Language of the Heart,” “AA Comes of Age,” “Pass It On” and the Big Book Pioneer story “He Sold Himself Short.” The variations in wording help to illustrate some of the difficulties that can occur when something is passed on by word-of-mouth.

Bill W’s recollection of the 6 Steps in April 1953, differ from the version he wrote about a few month later in a July 1953 Grapevine Article. The article was titled “A Fragment of History: Origin of the Twelve Steps.” Bill wrote: “Though these principles were advocated according to the whim or liking of each of us, and though in Akron and Cleveland they still stuck by the Oxford Group absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, this was the gist of our message to incoming alcoholics up to 1939, when our present Twelve Steps were put to paper.”

Bill’s 1953 Grapevine article is preserved in the book “The Language of the Heart.”
In December 1938, the first version of the 12 Steps was written at 182 Clinton St. It took Bill about 30 minutes. The draft of the 12 Steps, as Bill wrote them that night, has been lost. An approximate reconstruction is recorded in the book “Pass It On” on pages 198 and 199 and is shown in the illustration.

The wording that was changed is shown in bold red. Much (often heated) discussion took place to arrive at the final wording. One camp in NY (led by Hank P and Jim B) wanted less emphasis on God. Akron members liked the emphasis on God. Some members did not want to get on their knees in the proposed 7th Step. Others wanted to stay with 6 word-of-mouth Steps instead of increasing them to 12.

It should be noted, however, that as the Big Book progressively developed chapter by chapter, the Akron and NY groups came closer and closer into harmony. As a result of the process of informed group conscience and member participation in the editing, Bill’s role evolved from one of “author” to one of “umpire.”
“God as we understood Him” - January 1939

In January 1939, the book text and stories were completed. 400 multilith copies were sent out for review. NY member Jim B suggested the phrases “God as we understood Him” and “Power greater than ourselves” be added to the Steps and basic text. Bill W later wrote “Those expressions, as we so well know today, proved lifesavers for many an alcoholic.” Jim B’s Big Book story is “A Vicious Cycle.” He went on to start AA in Philadelphia and helped start AA in Baltimore.

Board Increased to 7 Trustees - January 1939

In January 1939, the size of the Alcoholic Foundation Board increased from 5 to 7 Trustees. Non-alcoholics still held the majority on the board. The 2 new members were alcoholic Harry B as the newly appointed 2nd Board Chairman and Dr Leonard V Strong (Bill W’s brother-in-law).

Harry B (whose Big Book story is “A Different Slant”) also returned to drinking and was replaced in December 1939. From that point on the Board Chair has been a non-alcoholic ever since.
Cornwall Press and Galley Proofs - March 1939

By March 1939, the multilith copies that were distributed in January were returned. Reader's comments produced few alterations in the final text. However, a major change did occur based on the suggestion of a Montclair, NJ psychiatrist, Dr Howard, who recommended toning down the use of “you musts” and changing the tone to “we ought” or “we should.” Dr Silkworth and Dr Harry Tiebout offered similar advice.

Later in March 1939, the much changed book manuscript was turned over to Tom Uzzell. He was a friend of Hank P, an editor at Collier's and a member of the NYU faculty. The manuscript was variously estimated as 600 to 800 pages (including personal stories).

Uzzell reduced it to approximately 400 pages. Most cuts came from the personal stories. The Akron, OH stories were edited by Jim S, a journalist from Akron. Jim’s Big Book story was originally titled “Traveler, Editor, Scholar” and later changed to “The News Hawk”)

Following Uzzell’s editing, Bill W, Hank P, Ruth Hock and Dorothy S (wife of Cleveland pioneer Clarence S) drove to Cornwall, NY and gave a much-altered manuscript to the printing plant of Cornwall Press. When the plant manager
saw the condition of the manuscript, he almost sent them back to type a clean copy.

Hank P persuaded the manager to accept the manuscript on condition that the group would examine and correct galley proofs as they came off the press. The group checked in to a local hotel and spent the next several days proofreading galleys.

By the way, that particular manuscript copy sold at auction not long ago for over one and a half million dollars.

First Edition Big Book - April 4, 1939

On April 4, 1939, 4,730 copies of the first edition of “Alcoholics Anonymous” were published at $3.50 a copy ($46 today). The printer, Edward Blackwell of Cornwall Press, was told to use the thickest paper in his shop. The large, bulky volume became known as the Big Book and the name has stuck ever since. The idea behind the thick and large paper was to convince the alcoholic he was getting his money’s worth.

Ray C (whose Big Book story is “An Artist’s Concept”) designed the “circus color” dust
jacket (and alternate dust jacket).
The book had 8 Roman and 400 Arabic numbered pages. “The Doctor’s Opinion” started as page 1 and the basic text ended at page 174.

The manuscript story of an Akron member “Ace Full -Seven - Eleven” was dropped (reputedly, because he was not too pleased with changes made to the first drafts of the Steps and text). 29 stories were included: 10 from the east coast, 18 from the mid-west and 1 from the west coast (which was ghost written by Ruth Hock and removed from the book in the second printing). One of the stories “An Alcoholic’s Wife” was written by non-alcoholic Marie B from Akron, OH. Dr Bob’s story was originally titled “The Doctor’s Nightmare” and later changed to “Dr Bob’s Nightmare.”

“We The People” -April 29, 1939
On April 29, 1939, Morgan R (a former advertising man, asylum patient and friend of Gabriel Heatter) appeared on Heatter’s 9PM radio program “We the People.” He told his story and made a pitch for the Big Book.

Prior to the broadcast, Bill W and others raised $500 ($6,500 today) to mail out 20,000 post cards to physicians about the broadcast. There were only 12 replies.
In April 1939, Bill W and Lois had to vacate their home at 182 Clinton St. It began an almost 2-year period of moving from house to house and staying with friends. Later, by Lois’ count, it amounted to 54 moves.
First Group To Call Itself “Alcoholics Anonymous” - May 1939

In May 1939, led by pioneer member Clarence S (whose Big Book story is “Home Brewmeister”) the Cleveland, OH group met separately from Akron and the Oxford Group at the home of Abby G (whose Big Book story is “He Thought He Could Drink Like a Gentleman”).

This was the first group to call itself “Alcoholics Anonymous.” Based on this narrow thread, Clarence S began to call himself the “founder of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

The Clevelanders still sent their most difficult cases to Dr Bob in Akron for treatment.
Cleveland Membership Surges - Fall 1939

In September 1939, Liberty Magazine, headed by Fulton Oursler, carried a piece titled “Alcoholics and God” by Morris Markey (who was influenced to write the article by Charles Towns).

Oursler (author of “The Greatest Story Ever Told”) became good friends with Bill W. He later served as a Trustee and also served on the Grapevine editorial board.

The Liberty magazine article generated about 800 inquiries from around the nation. Shortly after, the Cleveland Plain Dealer carried a series of very favorable editorials by Elrick B Davis. The newspaper provided its readers with a phone number to call for referral. The Cleveland group was soon provided with referrals at a rate that took everything they had, and then some, to keep up with. New members with 1 or 2 days sobriety were assigned to make 12th Step calls.

In October 1939, a disappointing review of the Big Book in the Journal of the American Medical Association was quite unfavorable and dismissive of the Big Book. Nevertheless, membership grew suddenly in Cleveland, to over 100 hundred members, due to the September Liberty Magazine article and editorials in the Cleveland Plain Dealer.
Akron Separates From the Oxford Group - October 1939

In late October, Akron, OH alcoholic members withdrew from the Oxford Group and held meetings at Dr Bob’s house. It was a very painful separation due to the great affection the members had toward T Henry and Clarace Williams. In January 1940, meetings moved from Dr Bob’s house to the King School on Wednesday night.

The Rockefeller Dinner - February 8, 1940
On February 8, 1940, John D Rockefeller Jr held a dinner for AA at the Union League Club in NYC. Nelson Rockefeller hosted in the absence of his ill father. The dinner led to favorable publicity for AA and raised $2,200 ($29,000 today) from attendees ($1,000 from Rockefeller).

Rockefeller and the dinner guests continued to donate about $3,000 a year (equivalent to $34,000 today) up to 1945 when they were asked to stop donating and were repaid out of Big Book income.

**AA Starts in Texas - February 1940**

In February 1940, the Houston Press ran a series of 6 articles about AA. They were written anonymously by Larry J. Larry was a newspaperman and Cleveland, OH member, who nearly died from the dt’s and had a lung ailment which required him to spend much time in an oxygen tent.
Larry set out from Cleveland by train to live and work in Houston. While on the train he experienced a spiritual awakening. He wrote the series of articles after arriving in Houston. The articles became an early AA pamphlet.

Larry J, who was sponsored by Clarence S, had never previously attended an AA meeting. But he went on to start AA in TX. Early members of the Houston group went on to carry the AA message to other cities in the US.

The GSO Archives scrapbooks of newspaper clippings show that AA in the Fort Worth and Dallas area started in 1941.

**Works Publishing Inc - May 1940**

In March 1940, the Alcoholic Foundation office moved from 17 William St Newark, NJ to 30 Vesey St in NYC. Its mailing address was Box 658 Church St Annex Post Office. Ruth Hock became AA’s first national Secretary.

In April 1940, Hank P got drunk after 4 years sobriety. He had objected violently to the office move from NJ to NYC. He
was fighting with his wife, and wanted to divorce her. He also wanted to marry Ruth Hock who refused him.

In May 1940, Works Publishing Co was incorporated. Bill W gave up his stock with a stipulation that Dr Bob and Anne would receive 10% royalties on the Big Book for life. Hank P was persuaded to relinquish his shares for a $200 payment ($2,600 today) for office furniture he claimed belonged to him. Hank, harboring much resentment against Bill, went to Cleveland in June and claimed that Bill was getting rich from the Rockefellers and taking Big Book profits for himself.

Clarence S (founder of Cleveland AA and Hank’s brother-in-law for a number of years in the 1940’s) spent many years accusing Bill of financial irregularities and claiming himself as the true founder of AA.

In October 1940, Bill W went to Philadelphia to speak to Curtis Bok, one of the owners of the Saturday Evening Post (the largest general circulation magazine in the US with a readership of 3,000,000).

Later, in December, Jack Alexander was assigned by the Post to do a story on AA.

---

**Saturday Evening Post - March 1, 1941**
Jack Alexander's Saturday Evening Post article was published March 1, 1941. With a circulation over 3 million, it helped AA membership jump from 2,000 to 8,000 in 1941. Thousands of appeals for help were mailed to the NY office. The office asked Groups to donate $1 ($12 today) per member for support. This began the practice of financing the GSO from group and member donations.

Bill’s and others’ pictures appeared full-face in the Saturday Evening Post article. The photo caption read, “A typical club house discussion group.”

**Step Twelve Wording Change - March 1941**

In March 1941, the wording of Step 12 was changed in the second printing of the first edition Big Book. The term “spiritual experience” was changed to “spiritual awakening” and the term “as the result of these steps” was changed to “as the result of those steps.”

Appendix II, “Spiritual Experience” was added to the book. This was done because many members thought they had to have a sudden and spectacular spiritual experience similar to the one Bill had in Towns Hospital. The appendix emphasized that most spiritual experiences were of the type that the psychologist William James called the “educational
variety.”
The Herbert Spencer quote was added to Appendix II in the second edition Big Book. It first appeared in the story “An Artists Concept” by Ray C (who also designed the Big Book’s dust jacket). The Spencer quote does not appear to be an accurate attribution. No written work by Spencer can be found containing the quote.
The story “Lone Endeavor” (of Pat C from CA) was removed. It had been ghost written by Ruth Hock. Pat, who claimed to have sobered up from a manuscript copy of the Big Book, was invited to NY shortly after the book was printed and arrived in NY quite drunk.

**Stepping Stones -April 11, 1941**

After 23 years of marriage, Bill W and Lois moved into their own home in Bedford Hills, NY in April 1941. It was first named “Bill-Lo’s Break” and later renamed to “Stepping Stones.” The 7-room house, on 1.7 acres, was financed at $6,500 ($81,000 today). The mortgage was $40 a month ($500 today).

**Buy Back of Works Publishing Stock -1942**

In 1942, Board Trustee A LeRoy Chipman asked John D Rockefeller Jr and his 1940 dinner guests for a loan of
$8,500 (equivalent to $95,000 today) to buy back the remaining outstanding shares of Works Publishing stock. Rockefeller lent $4,000, his son Nelson $500 and the other dinner guests $4,000.

Rockefeller’s custom was to forgive $1 of debt for each $1 repaid. This loan, along with other donations, were repaid to Rockefeller and the dinner guests in 1945 out of Big Book income.

Compensation for Special Services - October 1942

In October 1942, Clarence S stirred up a controversy in Cleveland after discovering that Dr Bob and Bill W were receiving royalties from Big Book sales. Bill and Dr Bob reexamined the problem of their financial status and concluded that royalties seemed the only answer to the problem. Bill sought counsel from Father Edward Dowling who was Bill’s spiritual sponsor. Father Dowling suggested that Bill and Dr Bob could not accept money for 12th Step work but should accept royalties as compensation for special services. This later formed the basis for Tradition 8.

Correspondence from groups gave early signs of a need to develop guidelines to help with problems that occurred repeatedly among the groups. Basic ideas for the 12
Traditions would emerge from this correspondence and the
principles that were defined in the Foreword to the 1st edition
Big Book.

**The AA Grapevine - June 1944**

In June 1944, twelve hundred copies of the first issue of the
“Grapevine” were published. A 1-year subscription was
$1.50 ($15 today). 6 volunteers started it as an 8-page
newsletter for members in the NYC area and for GIs
overseas. The GIs received it free.

**The Lost Weekend - 1944**

The book “The Lost Weekend” by Charles R Jackson was
published in 1944 to rave reviews. It described 5 days in the
life of an alcoholic and became a favorite in AA for its
realistic portrayal of alcoholism.

Jackson was a popular speaker at public AA meetings. A line
in the book, admittedly borrowed from AA, was a
bartender’s comment to its central character, alcoholic Don
Birnam, about his drinking which said: “one drink is too
many and a hundred not enough.” The book and Jackson
were later discussed and praised in the Grapevine.

The 1945 movie version of The Lost Weekend starred Ray
Milland and Jane Wyman. It won 4 Oscars for best picture, best director, best screenplay and best actor.

Earl T -April 1945

In April 1945, Earl T, the founder of AA in Chicago, suggested that Bill W codify the Traditions and write essays on them in the Grapevine. Earl played a significant role in the development of the Traditions (both the long and short forms).

In August 1945, the Grapevine carried Bill W’s first article titled “Modesty One Plank for Good Public Relations.” It set the groundwork for Bill’s 5-year campaign for the Traditions. Earl’s Big Book story is “He Sold Himself Short.” He is also the member described in the Big Book chapter “The Family Afterward” (pg 135) as getting drunk again after his wife nagged him about his smoking and drinking coffee.

Earl later served as a Board Trustee from 1950 to 1952 and helped establish the General Service Conference.

Fully Self Supporting, Declining Outside Contributions -1945

In 1945, the Alcoholic Foundation wrote to John D
Rockefeller Jr and the 1940 dinner guests that AA no longer needed their financial help. Big Book royalties could look after Dr Bob and Bill and group contributions could pay the office expenses.

This ended all outside contributions to AA. It led to the principle of being fully self supporting, declining all outside contributions and later formed the basis of Tradition 7. The Rockefeller and dinner guest loans were repaid out of book income.

**Twelve Suggest Points for AA Tradition - April 1946 Grapevine**

The April 1946 Grapevine carried Bill’s essay “Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition” (they would later be called the long form of the Traditions). Bill also started to feel out the board and the Fellowship on the idea of various geographical Areas coming together as an elected service conference. The board and Dr Bob were not very enthusiastic about the idea of a conference.

In April 1946, the Grapevine was incorporated as one of the two publishing arms of the Alcoholic Foundation. Bill wrote Grapevine essays on the Traditions up to November 1949 ending with an essay on the short form of the Traditions (in preparation for the 1950 International Convention in
Cleveland). Bill’s Grapevine essays are preserved in the book “The Language of the Heart” and were used in writing the books “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions” and “AA Comes of Age.”

On April 8, 1947, following a year of talks on policy and structure, Bill W wrote a paper to the Alcoholic Foundation Board titled “Our AA General Service Center -The Alcoholic Foundation of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” It outlined a history of the Foundation and recommended implementation of a General Service Conference. It also recommended that the Foundation’s name be changed to the “General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

The AA Preamble -June 1947 Grapevine

In June 1947, the “AA Preamble” first appeared in the Grapevine. It was written by Tom Y, Grapevine’s editor and was based on the foreword to the 1st edition Big Book. Later that year, the December 1947 Grapevine reported that a new 48-page pamphlet titled “AA Tradition” was sent to each group and that enough copies were available for each member to have one free of charge.

A sad and dark cloud emerged in 1947. Dr Bob was stricken with cancer.
Dr Bob and Anne - Summer 1948
In June 1948, Dr Bob’s cancer was diagnosed as terminal. He closed his office and retired from practice so that he and Anne could live their last days together quietly. In his last year, Dr Bob fulfilled a life-long dream of obtaining a convertible automobile (a black Buick Roadmaster).

Anne Smith - June 1, 1949
In the following year, Anne Ripley Smith (age 69) died at St Thomas Hospital on June 1, 1949. She was much revered by the Akron, OH members and by Bill and Lois. Her last years were spent nearly blind due to severe cataracts. In a July 1949 memorial Grapevine article, Bill W wrote that Anne was “quite literally, the mother of our first group, Akron #1 and in the full sense of the word she was one of the founders of AA.”
The Short Form of the Traditions - November 1949 Grapevine

As plans for the first International Convention were underway, Earl T suggested to Bill W that the “Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition” would benefit from revision and shortening.

Bill, with Earl’s help, set out to develop the short form of the 12 Traditions. The short form of the Traditions was printed in the November 1949 Grapevine. The entire November issue was dedicated to the Traditions for the coming Cleveland Convention in 1950.

Two wording changes were made for the final version of the short form of the Traditions:

the term “primary spiritual aim” was changed to “primary purpose” in Tradition 6 and the term “principles above personalities” was changed to “principles before personalities” in
Tradition 12.

First International Convention - Cleveland, OH - July 28 to 30, 1950

AA’s 15th anniversary and 1st International Convention took place at Cleveland, OH from July 28 to 30, 1950. There were an estimated 3,000 attendees. Registration was $1.50 per person (the equivalent of $11 today).

On July 30, 1950, Dr Bob made a brief appearance for his last talk.

The published program (likely through the influence of Clarence S) described Cleveland, OH as “the birthplace of our movement.”

Attendees adopted the 12 Traditions unanimously by standing vote.
"The prince of the Twelfth Steppers" - November 16, 1950

In the spring of 1950, Dr Bob expressed a wish to do 3 things:

1. Go to the first International Convention in Cleveland.
2. Go to his hometown of St Johnsbury, VT for his vacation.
3. Spend Christmas with his son in Texas.

Two of his wishes were fulfilled.

On November 12, 1950, Bill W visited Dr Bob in Akron, OH for their last visit together. Bill advised Dr Bob that the Alcoholic Foundation Board would soon be issuing a statement of support for a trial period of the General Service Conference. Dr Bob gave Bill his endorsement as well.

Four days later, on November 16, 1950, Dr Robert Holbrook Smith (age 70) co-founder of AA, and 15 years sober, died of cancer at City Hospital in Akron. He was buried in Mt Peace Cemetery beside Anne. The Rev Walter Tunks conducted the funeral service. In his 15 years of sobriety, Dr Bob helped more than 5,000 alcoholics. In his eulogy, Bill W
described Dr Bob as “the prince of the Twelfth Steppers.”

A memorial issue of the Grapevine was issued for Dr Bob in January 1951. It is still available in facsimile copies today and provides a rich narrative and photographic history of Dr Bob.

As an endearing note, in December 1952, Cleveland’s St Vincent’s Charity Hospital Rosary Hall Solarium alcoholic ward opened. The ward was built by volunteer AA members and friends to assist (and as a tribute to) Sister Ignatia who transferred there from Akron, OH. The insignia on the door “RHS” coincided with the initials of Robert Holbrook Smith. It was Sister Ignatia’s dedication as a memorial to Dr Bob.

The Foundation Agrees to Try the Conference - December 1950

In December 1950, Leonard Harrison and Bernard B Smith resolved a 5-year conflict between Bill W and the Alcoholic Foundation Board on having a General Service Conference. The previous October Harrison had appointed Smith to chair a Trustee’s committee on the proposed Conference. In December 1950, the committee formally and unanimously recommended giving the Conference a try on a test or trial basis.
First General Service Conference - April 20 to 22, 1951

In April 1951, 37 US/Canadian Delegates (half the planned number) convened as Panel 1 of the General Service Conference. NETA’s Delegate was Olin L from Dallas. The Conference recommended that AA literature should have Conference approval. At the close of the Conference, Lois W, with her close friend and neighbor, Anne B, invited the delegates’ wives and local family group members to Stepping Stones to discuss an organization for what was then called “AA Family Groups.”

The previous December, 50,000 copies of a preliminary pamphlet titled The Third Legacy were distributed. It explained the Conference preliminary organization. Bill W stumped the country attending over 2 dozen Assemblies electing Area Committees and General Service Conference Delegates.

Following the first General Service Conference, the first draft of “The Third Legacy Manual Of World Service As Proposed By Bill” was published.
NETA Panel 1 Delegate -1951

After the first Conference, Northeast Texas Area Panel 1 Delegate, Olin L, had a short article printed in the June 1951 Grapevine in a section titled “Delegate’s Impressions.” In the article, Olin revealed that he was a little over 5 years sober when he was selected as a Delegate.

Olin L is shown center right in the photo (wearing a sweater). He also played a key role in assisting Ebby T when he came to live in Texas and sober up. Ebby can be seen in the photo to the far right.

From 1951 on, the June issue of the Grapevine is traditionally devoted to reporting on the annual General Service Conference proceedings.
Conference-approved Literature - April 1952

In April 1952, Panel 2 (38 more delegates) joined with Panel 1 for the first Conference of all Delegates attending. Based on a 1951 advisory action, the Board formed a special committee on literature and submitted a report to the 1952 Conference recommending literature items that should be retained and future literature items that would be needed. Bill W also made a presentation of the literature projects he was engaged in.

They included:

1. Updating the Story section of the Big Book.
2. A series of orderly point-by-point essays on the 12 Steps.
4. A kind of popular history of AA & its ideas of recovery, tradition & service.
6. A reference manual stating our total experience with the whole idea of service functions.

The Conference unanimously approved the Board
proposals and Bill's literature projects. Bill's projects led to development of 6 Conference-approved books:

2. 12 Steps and 12 Traditions in 1953
3. The second edition Big Book in 1955
4. AA Comes of Age in 1957
5. 12 Concepts for World Service in 1962
6. The AA way of Life in 1966 (later renamed to As Bill Sees It in 1975) The Conference also retroactively approved the Big Book and several pamphlets.

The “12&12” -1953
The 1953 General Service Conference adopted a policy that no action should be taken on matters liable to gravely affect AA unless by consent of ¾ majority.

In June 1953, the 12&12 was published. Bill W described the
work, as “This small volume is strictly a textbook which explains AA’s 24 basic principles and their application, in detail and with great care.”

Betty L and Tom P helped Bill in writing the 12&12. Jack Alexander also helped with editing. It was published in 2 editions: one for $2.25 ($15.50 today) for distribution through AA groups, and a $2.75 ($19 today) edition distributed through Harper & Brothers for sale in commercial bookstores.

### I’ll Cry Tomorrow - 1954 and 1955

The 1954 Conference recommended that all Conference-approved literature have on its face an identifying symbol. This later produced the circle and triangle logo. The Conference also recommended that a publication called the “AA Exchange Bulletin” be approved. In 1956, the publication was renamed to “Box 459.”

In other advisory actions, the Conference authorized the renaming the “Alcoholic Foundation” to the “General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.” The Conference also
decided that the publication rights of a very popular book titled “Twenty-Four Hours a Day” should not be accepted. The book was written by AA member Richmond W. Almost 20 years later, the 1972 Conference, decided once again that the “The Twenty-Four Hour Book” not be confirmed as Conference-approved literature.

Also in 1954, Lillian R (actress and nightclub singer) became the first of many celebrities to break their anonymity and announce their membership in AA. Her book (later movie) “I’ll Cry Tomorrow” was a national sensation. In 1955, Susan Hayward’s performance as Lillian won her an Academy Award nomination. Sadly, Lillian went on to drink again and it generated bad publicity for AA.

AA Comes of Age -July 1 to 3, 1955

AA’s 20th anniversary and 2nd International Convention occurred in St Louis, MO, on July 1 to 3, 1955. AA came of age. AA’s old-timers turned over the stewardship of AA to the movement. The General Service Conference became the Guardian of the Traditions and group conscience of the entire Fellowship. It was unanimously adopted by the Convention by acclamation and by the Conference by formal resolution and vote. (Note: the Conference was held from June 26 to 29 and July 3 in St
Louis).
The 2nd edition Big Book was published. 30 new personal stories were introduced. In 1955, the General Service Board adopted the practice of using the titles “Chairman” and “Vice Chairman” instead of “President” and “Vice President.” If anyone ever dreamed of being “the president of AA” the opportunity existed for 20 years and you missed it.

**“Came to Believe” - December 1955 Grapevine**
The December 1955 Grapevine carried a painting by volunteer illustrator Robert M of a man on a bed being 12th Stepped by two members. The painting’s title was “Came To Believe.” In 1973, when the book “Came To Believe” was published, Grapevine editors changed the painting’s name to “The Man On The Bed” to avoid confusion.

Over the years, “The Man On The Bed” has become one of the most popular images in the AA Fellowship.

After 1955, the depression that had plagued Bill W for so long, lifted and he regained his bright outlook.

**Step Twelve Wording Changed a Second Time - 1956**
The following year, in 1956, the wording of Step 12 changed again in the 2nd printing of the 2nd edition Big Book. The term “as the result of those steps” was changed back to “as the result of these steps.”

At the 1956 General Service Conference, Bill W spoke on the rights of petition, appeal, participation and decision. These would later become key basic principles of the 12 Concepts for World Service.

The Book “AA Comes of Age” - April 1957
The 1957 General Service Conference approved publication of “AA Comes of Age.” Guised as a 3-day diary of the 1955 Convention, it is a definitive history of AA up to 1955. One version was printed by Harper & Brothers and sold in commercial book stores. The other version was sold at a discounted price within AA.

The Conference also recommended that no change in Article 12 of the Conference Charter or in AA Tradition or in the 12 Steps may be made with less than the written consent of ¾ of AA groups.

AA Preamble Changed - April 1958
The following year, the 1958 General Service
Conference approved removing the word “honest” from the term “honest desire to stop drinking” in the AA Preamble. It also changed the term “AA has no dues or fees” to “There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.”

The wording of the Conference advisory action can give the misleading impression that the Traditions were changed. The advisory action reads: “The General Service Conference recognize the original use of the word ‘honest’ before ‘desire to stop drinking’ and its deletion from the Traditions as part of the evolution of the AA movement. Any change to be left to the discretion of AA Publishing, Inc.”

The advisory action did not change the Traditions nor did it change the Foreword to the first Edition Big Book. The Conference also recommended that the name “General Service HQ” be changed to “General Service Office.” The following year, in 1959, “AA Publishing, Inc.” was renamed to “AA World Services, Inc.”

Days of Wine and Roses -1958 and 1962
J P Miller’s “Days of Wine and Roses” premiered in 1958 on CBS-TV’s Playhouse 90. It starred Cliff Robertson (as Joe
Clay) and Piper Laurie (as Joe’s wife Kirsten). AA cooperated in its production. The story centered on Joe’s testimony at an AA meeting. The ending found him in recovery but his wife continued to drink and abandoned Joe and their daughter.

The Warner Brothers movie premiered in 1962 starring Jack Lemmon and Lee Remick. The TV version portrayed the story as occurring in NY. The film version was set in San Francisco. Nominated for several Academy Awards, it won for Best Song.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twelve Concepts for World Service - April 1962</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a talk to the 1960 General Service Conference, Bill W announced that for the past 3 years, he had been working on codifying principles and developing essays for the structure of the Third Legacy of Service. The principles were announced as the “12 Concepts for World Service.” 2 years later, the 1962 General Service Conference unanimously approved Bill’s manuscript for the “12 Concepts for World Service” and recommended that it supplement and be an integral part of The Third Legacy Manual. The following year, the 1963 General Service Conference organized the US and Canada into 6 geographical Regions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regional Trustees were elected to the board as Class B (or alcoholic) Trustees.

**Board Ratio Changes -April 1966**

The 1966 General Service Conference, changed the Board Trustee ratio to 14 Class B alcoholic Trustees and 7 Class A non-alcoholic Trustees. This ended Bill’s 10-year campaign to have alcoholics make up a majority of the Board Trustees.

**Big Book Copyright Lapses -April 1967**

The copyright to the 1st edition Big Book expired in April 1967 and was not renewed. The oversight was not discovered until 1985. It was also discovered that the copyright to new material in the 2nd edition had lapsed in 1983. Both AAWS and the Wilson estate shared responsibility for copyright renewal.

Note: the copyright is still in force overseas by treaty agreement. Over the following years, Bill’s health steadily deteriorated due to emphysema. In July 1970, his last public appearance took place at AA’s 35th Anniversary and 5th International Convention in Miami. Bill was confined to a wheel-chair and required the continued administration of oxygen.
William Griffith Wilson - January 24, 1971

William Griffith Wilson (age 75) co-founder of AA, 36 years sober, died at Miami Beach, FL on January 24, 1971.

It was his and Lois’ 53rd wedding anniversary. Bill was the architect and author of AA’s three Legacies and all the written works that explained them.

This was an amazing achievement. He had no training at all as a writer. In 1990, Life Magazine named Bill one of the 100 most important figures of the 20th century.
Short Form of the Twelve Concepts - April 1971

3 months after Bill’s death, the 1971 General Service Conference approved the “short form” of the 12 Concepts for World Service.

Box 1980 - 1974

In order to maintain subscriber’s anonymity, the legal name of “The AA Grapevine” was changed in 1974 to “Box 1980.” It was done to comply with postal regulations that required the corporate name of an organization be placed on official envelopes and on the magazine itself.


Third Edition Big Book -1976
The 1976 General Service Conference approved publication of the 3rd edition Big Book.
Distribution of the first three editions of the Big Book was: For the 1st edition 300,000 copies were distributed from 1939 to 1955. For the 2nd edition 1,150,000 copies were distributed from 1955 to 1976. For the 3rd edition 19,550,000 copies were distributed from 1976 to 2002.
The 1976 Conference also decided that any change to the Steps, Traditions, Concepts and 6 Warranties of Article 12 would require approval of 75% of all AA Groups worldwide. The Conference Advisory Action makes any change whatsoever to the Steps, Traditions and Concepts a virtual impossibility (even so much as adding or removing a comma).
The Conference also recommended going forward with mini-conferences and providing them as often as possible. The sense of the meeting was for the time being the regional meetings should be known as “AA Regional Forums.”

Biographies of the Co-founders -1980 and 1984
The 1980 Conference approved publication of Dr Bob’s
biography “Dr Bob and the Good Oldtimers.” 4 years later the Conference approved publication of Bill W’s biography “Pass It On.” The Northeast Texas Area Archives has a copy of an early manuscript of “Pass It On” that was originally titled “Bill W and His Friends.”

Fourth Edition Big Book -2002
Total distribution of the Big Book reached the 22 million mark in 2001. Very, very few books have had that kind of circulation. The 1-millionth copy of the Big Book was presented to President Richard Nixon in April 1973; the 2-millionth copy to HEW Secretary Joseph Califano in June 1979. The 5-millionth copy was presented to Ruth Hock in July 1985. She typed draft after draft of the original manuscript.

The 10-millionth copy was presented to Nell Wing in July 1990. She was Bill W’s longtime (nonalcoholic) secretary and AA’s first archivist. The 15-millionth copy was given to Ellie Norris in 1996. She was the widow of former trustee chairman John L. Norris, MD. In 2000, the 20-millionth copy was presented to the Fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups.

In 2002, the Conference approved publication of the 4th edition Big Book. More than 2,000,000 copies of the 4th
Summary History of the Three Legacies of AA

The 12 Steps evolved over the period of 1938 to 1955: 6 Steps were used prior to Dec 1938 and were passed on by word of mouth. The 12 Steps were drafted in December 1938 as part of a book of experience (the Big Book). Step 12’s wording was changed in March 1941 in the 2nd printing of the 1st edition Big Book and changed again in 1955 in the 2nd printing of the 2nd edition Big Book.

The 12 Traditions evolved over the period 1939 to 1950: Many principles of the Traditions appeared in the foreword to the 1st edition Big Book. The “12 Suggested Points for AA Tradition” appeared in the April 1946 Grapevine and became known as the long form of the Traditions. The short form of the Traditions appeared in the November 1949 Grapevine (2 wording changes were made). The Traditions were approved July 30, 1950 at the 1st International Convention in Cleveland, OH.

The 12 Concepts for World Service evolved over the period 1962 to 1971: the 12 Concepts of World Service (and the book) were approved by the 1962 Conference. The short form of the Concepts was approved by the 1971 Conference.

Edition have been distributed so far. The price of the 4th edition was set at $5.00 as a special introductory price.
Finally, the 1976 Conference decided that any change to the Steps, Traditions or Concepts and 6 Warranties of Article 12, would require written approval of 75% of the AA Groups worldwide. The 3 Legacies of AA were indelibly in place.

The Three Legacies of AA
AA’s story began with a 5-month sober, and still somewhat shaky, stock broker from NY. He met a doctor in Akron, OH who wanted desperately to get sober. It’s probably safe to say that, at the time they met, they had no idea of the Fellowship of alcoholics that would spring out of their humble meeting and how it would save the lives of millions of alcoholics.

Their legacy is today described as Recovery, Unity and Service. It was our gift to freely receive and it is our duty to freely give away. It’s been a remarkable journey down the Road of Happy Destiny. And that brings us to our conclusion. I hope you found the presentations informative and enjoyable. Thank you for the opportunity to present it.