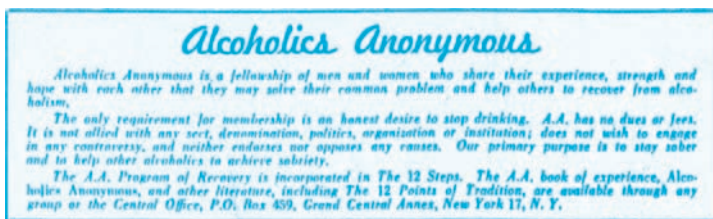


## On the Origins of the A.A. Preamble, and other FAQs

**Q. Who wrote A.A.'s Preamble? And when was the word "honest" dropped from it (i.e. "honest desire to stop drinking"), and why?**



**A.** The Preamble first appeared in the Grapevine in June 1947, and was written by Tom Y., the Grapevine editor at that time. The aim was to offer a concise definition of A.A. Shortly thereafter, the Preamble began appearing in each monthly issue of the Grapevine, and later on in much of our A.A. Conference-approved literature.

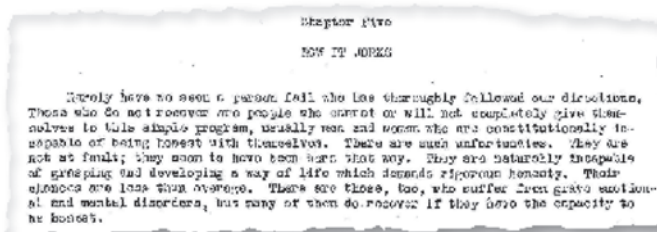
It came to be called the preamble because it is so often read at the opening of A.A. meetings.

The original version of the Preamble contained the wording, "an honest desire to stop drinking." However, since the adoption of the short form of the Traditions in 1950, the Third Tradition has always read, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking" and this form was used by Bill in writing the book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

In 1958 the expression "honest desire" was discussed at great length at the General Service Conference. It was felt that it was impossible to determine what constitutes an "honest" desire to stop drinking, thus the word was dropped. The version of the Preamble without the word "honest" first appeared in the September 1958 issue of the Grapevine.

There have been other versions of the Preamble, written by A.A. members for their local groups' use, which were then circulated around A.A.; for example: the "Texas Preamble," the "Wilmington Preamble," etc. Many A.A. members find these interesting, though they have never been adopted by the Fellowship as a whole.

**Q. I've heard it said that Bill always wished he could change the beginning of "How It Works" to read "Never have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path" (rather than "Rarely have we seen..."). Is this true?**



*Those involved in writing "How It Works" chose the word "rarely" (as in "rarely have we seen") as opposed to "never" to avoid seeming to make oversized claims for A.A.*

**A.** No. A rumor has persisted for years that Bill wished he could have changed "rarely" to "never." But we know through Bill's own words that is not the case. In a letter to Les V., dated May 25, 1961 Bill W. wrote:

*"...Concerning your comment about the use of the word 'rarely' in Chapter Five of the Big Book. My recollection is that we did give it considerable thought at the time of writing. I think the main reason for the use of 'rarely' was to avoid anything that would look like a claim for a 100% result. Assuming of course that an alcoholic is willing enough and sane enough, there can be a perfect score on such character. But since willingness and sanity are such illusive and fluctuating values, we simply didn't like to be too positive. The medical profession could jump right down our throats...I do remember thinking about it a lot."*

In addition, the following question and response were made at the 1970 General Service Conference, as part of the "Ask-It" Basket questions. Bill was, of course, still living at this time and was able to respond:

*Has Bill ever said, "If there was any change he would make in the Big Book, it would be to change the word 'rarely' to 'never' at the start of Chapter Five"?*

*"No, Bill said he had never considered this" (1970 General Service Conference Report, p. 31).*

**Q. What is the history behind A.A.'s Responsibility Statement?**

**A.** The Responsibility Statement reads:

*I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.*

It was written by former A.A. trustee Al S. for the 1965 A.A. International Convention in Toronto.

In the souvenir book for the 1965 Convention, Dr. Jack

Norris writes: “...We must remember that A.A. will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer; for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. has given us the power to choose—to drink or not to drink—and in doing so has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in A.A., and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose A.A. Strange, isn't it?”



*The Responsibility Statement was written by a former A.A. trustee for the 1965 A.A. International Convention in Toronto as the theme for the gathering. The Convention met at a time when some were voicing concern that the extraordinary success achieved by A.A. could lead to complacency.*

In a *Grapevine* article in October 1965, the Responsibility Statement is discussed, and Bill W. expresses his views:

*Two major thoughts stood out in the remarks of the many speakers, alcoholic and nonalcoholic, at A.A.'s July Toronto Convention. The first was admiration and gratitude for A.A.'s startling success in sobering up hundreds of thousands of lost-cause drunks. The other was concern that the success which has come to A.A. over the thirty years since its start in Akron, Ohio, in 1935 would not lead us to any complacency about the size of the job still to be done.*

*A.A.'s co-founder, Bill, in his talk to over 10,000 attending the major sessions of the Convention, stressed the need for cooperation with all who work on the problem of alcoholism, the more than 100 agencies in the United States and Canada alone now engaged in research, alcohol education and rehabilitation.*

*“Too often, we have deprecated and even derided these projects of our friends just because we do not always see eye to eye with them,” Bill said. “We should very seriously ask ourselves how many alcoholics have gone on drinking simply because we have failed to cooperate in good spirit with these many agencies. No alcoholic should go mad or die merely because he did not come straight to A.A. in the beginning.”*

There have been two Advisory Actions from the General Service Conference regarding the Declaration of Responsibility since it was introduced. In 1971, the Conference recommended that:

*The Literature Committee, following the general feeling of the Conference, reaffirm both the spirit and the wording of the “I am Responsible” Declaration from the International Convention held in Toronto in 1965.*

And in 1977, the Conference recommended that:

*The Responsibility Declaration not be changed, as it was made at the 1965 International Convention in Toronto.*

## **Q. What is the history behind A.A.'s Unity Declaration?**

### **A.** The Unity Declaration reads:

*This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.*

It was written for A.A.'s 35th Anniversary International Convention held in Miami Beach, Florida, in July 1970.

Documents in our collection indicate that the statement was composed as a combined effort of both the Committee on International Conventions and former A.A. trustee, Al S. The correspondence alludes to Al's involvement as a consultant in composing the statement. Al wrote the “Responsibility” Statement that had been introduced at the 1965 International Convention.

The “Unity” statement was read by delegates from different countries on Saturday night during the Unity Ceremony. Below are highlights from that night's ceremony, as led by former General Manager, Bob H.:

*“As you know the theme of this Conference is Unity Within Our Fellowship. We have asked several of our ex-delegates and members from overseas to be on stage and participate with us adopting our new Declaration of Unity...”*

*“A.A. unity is the special quality that makes our Fellowship unique. It is the cement that holds our society together, the platform which makes A.A. ‘Service’ possible. It is more than agreement on basic principles, more than freedom from destructive strife. It is a bond fashioned of shared experience, such as this one we share tonight.*

*“Unity is our most precious possession, our best guarantee of A.A.'s future. May we all value and preserve it, today and all the tomorrows to come.”*

Bob H. then asks all participants on stage to recite the Unity Declaration, which was led by Dr. Norris.

Following the International Convention (1973), the General Service Conference recommended that:

*The Unity Declaration be added to all A.A. Literature when feasible and economical, and be referred to A.A. World Services, Inc., for follow-through.*



## In 1941, a Doctor from Rochester Visited New York, and Took Home A.A.

By Bob D., Rochester Intergroup Archivist

Alcoholics Anonymous in Rochester, N.Y., got its start when Dr. G. Kirby Collier, having heard of A.A.'s success, traveled to New York City in December 1941 to see for himself. While there, he attended A.A. meetings and met with Bill W., who gave the doctor A.A. literature and suggested he introduce his alcoholic patients to the program.

Back in Rochester, Dr. Collier gave three of these patients the literature and explained the basics, then “threw them overboard,” as he put it. Within several weeks the trio of alcoholics had grown to six and had established the first permanent group in Rochester, the Seneca Group. On May 1, 2007, the Seneca Group celebrated its 65th anniversary. There now are 302 groups and 485 meetings every week in the city.

The Rochester Intergroup Archives Committee has been active in expanding, cataloging, preserving, and displaying Rochester's rich A.A. history. In 2005, the committee set about developing collection, preservation, and management policies to guide the Archives' growth, relying on the example of the G.S.O. Archives and standard archival best practices. Procedures for responding to access and research requests have resulted in increased access to the collection by the Rochester A.A. community and better use of the historical collections.

One result of the increased exposure and enthusiasm for the archives has been several significant donations to the collection, including several copies of the first and second editions of the Big Book. One of the first editions is a first printing donated by the University of Rochester. This book came stamped with the dates that the book was checked out from the library, starting in March 1940. The other first editions include a ninth printing and two fifteenth printings in excellent condition. The most recent donation to the archives is from a longtime member of the Rochester fellowship who received her first Big Book at the Twentieth Anniversary A.A. Convention in St. Louis in 1955. The book is a first printing of the second edition and is inscribed



*These early editions of the Big Book are part of the collection of the Rochester Intergroup archives. One of the editions was donated by the University of Rochester from its library and includes dates going back to 1940 indicating when the book was checked out.*



*The Rochester Intergroup archives sponsored an “Archives Road Show” last November to showcase some of its holdings, including recent significant additions.*

with a personal message from Bill W.

The archives committee has also been developing new exhibits to add to our traveling display that include tributes to Rochester's two A.A. medical pioneers, Dr. G. Kirby Collier and Dr. John L. Norris (who would serve 27 years as a Class A—nonalcoholic—trustee of A.A.'s General Service Board). Other new exhibits chronicle the development of Rochester's A.A. community through photographs, maps, and local ephemera such as pamphlets, cards, and meeting lists. In conjunction with the 65th anniversary of A.A. in Rochester, the archives committee published a revised edition of a previously produced history booklet titled *Rochester A.A.: The Early Years*.

This revised edition includes new material uncovered from recent research and is enhanced by photographs of non-alcoholic members of the Rochester community instrumental in the growth of the Fellowship and of significant locations in Rochester's early A.A. history.

In 2007, the Rochester Intergroup archives was moved to an established archival repository where the collections are stored in a secure and climate-controlled environment. This new space allows greater access to the local A.A. community, along with providing room for growth and the resources to properly maintain the collection. In the past year, the archives committee continued to expand its oral history program. The committee added several new interviews and is starting to produce written transcripts of the previous oral histories that will be cataloged and indexed by participant name, group name, and subject name and word headings.

Last November the Intergroup Archives sponsored an “Archives Road Show” featuring a presentation on the development of the Big Book, and a Road Show event where A.A. members shared their cherished A.A. memorabilia with the audience. Included was a three-person historical panel of long-

term members of the Rochester A.A. fellowship sharing their experiences of Rochester A.A. from the 1950s through the 1990s.

The latest project the archives committee has completed is the development of the Intergroup Archives web pages on the Rochester Intergroup website. The project started as a method to serve the larger Rochester Area A.A. community by expanding access to the archives.

The archives web pages explain the mission and purpose of the archives and offer three subcategories of information:

- *Committee Information*— details the management procedures and the forms to request research, access, donate to the collection, and to request the traveling display at individual A.A. functions and group anniversaries.
- *Committee News*— lists upcoming events and recent developments of the Archives.
- *Rochester A.A. History*— chronicles the history of Rochester A.A. with online exhibits, locally published historical monographs, and photographic displays of historical locations and items from the collections.

Although the web pages are in their beginning stages, the

Intergroup Archives Committee is confident that as the collections grow, the archives web pages will likewise evolve into a valuable resource to help carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous and to attract interest in preserving Rochester's Alcoholics Anonymous history.

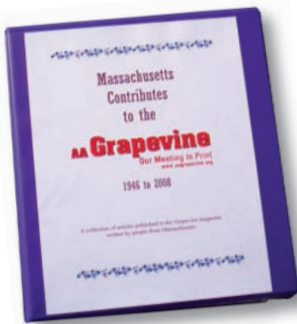
The Intergroup Archives Committee is busy with several projects. We have a large collection of historical recordings of A.A.'s founders and members of the founding generation of the fellowship that we are transferring from reel-to-reel recordings to cassette tapes and eventually will be transcribed to paper format. Another project is research into the origins of Alcoholics Anonymous in Central New York. We hope to use this research to publish an updated booklet of Central New York's A.A. history. The committee has several new exhibit proposals in the planning stages that will highlight our local A.A. history and help carry the message to the Fellowship.

The committee would welcome research requests and donations of A.A. historical material relating to the development of Rochester's A.A. fellowship. Either begin at the Archives web pages at the Intergroup website ([www.rochester-ny-aa.org/subcommittees/archives](http://www.rochester-ny-aa.org/subcommittees/archives)) and follow the instructions, or contact the Intergroup Archives at (585) 922-1876.

## Massachusetts A.A. Discovers Its Past in the Grapevine Digital Archives

By Susan B., Area 30 Archives Chair

A question posed to our Archives Committee in Eastern Massachusetts — what does the Grapevine have to do with Eastern Massachusetts?— prompted me to log onto the magazine's digital archives at [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org). A search for "massachusetts" returned a list of 593 articles on 60 index pages dating back to 1946! Some articles referenced groups still active in Eastern Massachusetts.



Around this time the Archives Committee was invited to participate in the Grapevine Committee's Awareness Day. We were asked to display archived Grapevine materials.

As we set flyers, minutes, and other assorted memorabilia aside for inclusion, it occurred to me that the articles in the Grapevine having to do with Massachusetts could be collected into a binder.

I returned to the digital archives and began to copy and paste these articles into Word documents. Saving them by date and title, I included the "Reprinted with permission..." credit given in *The Service Manual*. As the list of file names grew, I realized I should contact the Grapevine office to request explicit permission to proceed.

In response to my request, the Grapevine granted permis-

sion to download, print and present the articles provided our area followed a few simple steps. First, each article was to be presented in its entirety so as not to alter the author's intent or meaning and to preserve its integrity; and each was to be notated with the correct publication information, using the wording provided in *The A.A. Service Manual*.

We may keep this set of articles as an archived compendium of Grapevine articles from Massachusetts authors. It may be displayed but is not to be copied or redistributed without further permission. Additionally, we were asked to include information about the Grapevine Digital Archives itself and provide examples of the Digital Archives Index pages.

We printed each article with the appropriate reprint permission annotation within the header of each page, inserted the pages into archival sheet protectors in keeping with our archives practice, and placed them in chronological order in a three-ring binder. People at the Grapevine Awareness Day were drawn to the compilation and curious to learn about the tools available to them.

We look forward to incorporating the comprehensive set of "Massachusetts" articles by Massachusetts contributors from Massachusetts groups into our Area 30 archives with the hope that someday the reader will hear the voice of the Fellowship and know that the Grapevine has something going on in Eastern Massachusetts.