

June 1993



## A Half Century of Hope

*Our congratulations and thanks to Canada, no finer AA exists.*

*This far-flung society of ours has the odd quality of being everywhere the same, yet everywhere so different. We AAs are totally alike, whether by regions or by nations. This, of course, is just as it should be.*

*When AA travelers return from Canada they all report how much more they brought away from Canada than they took in . . . [Never] shall the bright memory ever fade of that day in Montreal when Lois and I heard the Lord's Prayer spoken in French and English - our first meeting in two languages.*

*We are immeasurably grateful for fast friends from Halifax to Vancouver, they are always the same: devoted workers upon that great fabric which is AA of today - and of tomorrow! ~ Bill*

**B**ill W. wrote those words to introduce the Grapevine's "Salute to Canada - Salut au Canada" in May 1951. Since 1951, when the Grapevine reported 299 Canadian groups and 7,251 members, the Fellowship in

Canada has grown to more than 5,000 groups and over 100,000 members, and AA has reached out from the major cities and towns and is thriving from the remote areas of the far North to the group in St. John's, Newfound-

land, which is farther east than any other group in North America. Canada has hosted two AA International Conventions: our 30th in Toronto in 1965, and AA's gala 50th birthday party in 1985 in Montreal.

In this special issue, the Grapevine once again pays tribute to Canada, as that great country celebrates its own 50th AA anniversary. The all-too-brief histories that follow lay the foundation for the story of Canada in the 1990s - a story that unfolds throughout this issue, told in the words and experiences of AA members today, who hold in their hands the legacy of the past and build on it to carry the message of AA into the future.

## ONTARIO

**Toronto** In January 1940, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote a review of the Big Book that was to have a profound effect on the very existence of AA in Ontario. The Rev. George Little, a minister of the United Church - a Temperance advocate who had tried unsuccessfully to sober up drunks - read the review, immediately ordered a copy, and shared it with others, drunks and nonalcoholics alike. One of the nonalcoholics was Canon Quintin Warner. Canon Warner passed the book on to a hospitalized alcoholic friend, who read it and, on March 29, 1942, made a decision to stay sober.

The two nonalcoholic friends of AA were soon joined by another, the

Rev. Percy G. Price from the Metropolitan United Church in Toronto. Fueled by a deep faith in AA principles, Rev. Price got together a group consisting of himself, Dr. Little, and six alcoholics to discuss "alcoholism and how to cope with it."

This dinner meeting, held at the



Little Denmark Restaurant fifty years ago in Toronto on January 13, 1943, marked the first AA meeting in all of Canada. The success of that first meeting led to regular weekly meetings at the Metropolitan United Church House, and from the original six members, within a few weeks attendance had tripled.

Dr. Little meanwhile ordered more Big Books, and in 1942 the Alcoholic Foundation granted him Canadian distribution rights. The fledgling Fellowship in Canada now had all it needed to grow: six sober members, a supply of Big Books, and staunch nonalcoholic friends.

**Windsor and London** Before a year had gone by, two other Ontario cities had established AA ties. In

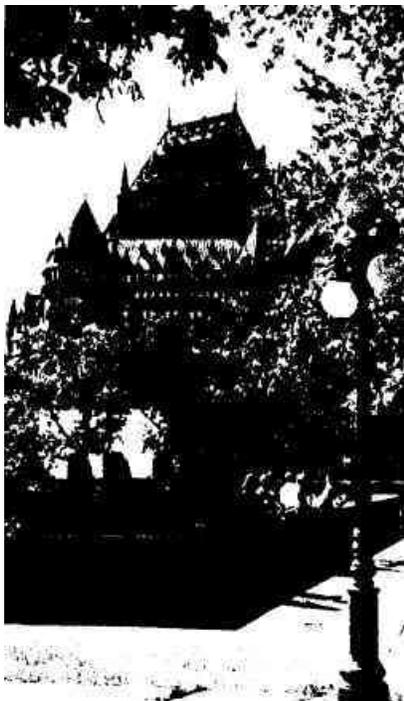
Windsor, a drunk contacted AA in Detroit and began attending meetings there. He soon found another and then another, and the three held their first meeting in October 1943. The message soon spread to London, where the first meeting took place in November of that year.

## QUEBEC

Many old-timers report that AA in "La Belle Province" was born by mail. The Jack Alexander article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the Big Book, and correspondence with the Alcoholic Foundation helped Dave B. find sobriety in April 1944, and shortly thereafter, New York Headquarters sent him about 400 letters from Montrealers asking for help. (A year or so earlier, Dr. Travis E. Dancey, a nonalcoholic physician, had gotten hold of a copy of the Big Book and tried to interest Dave - who literally threw the book at him!)

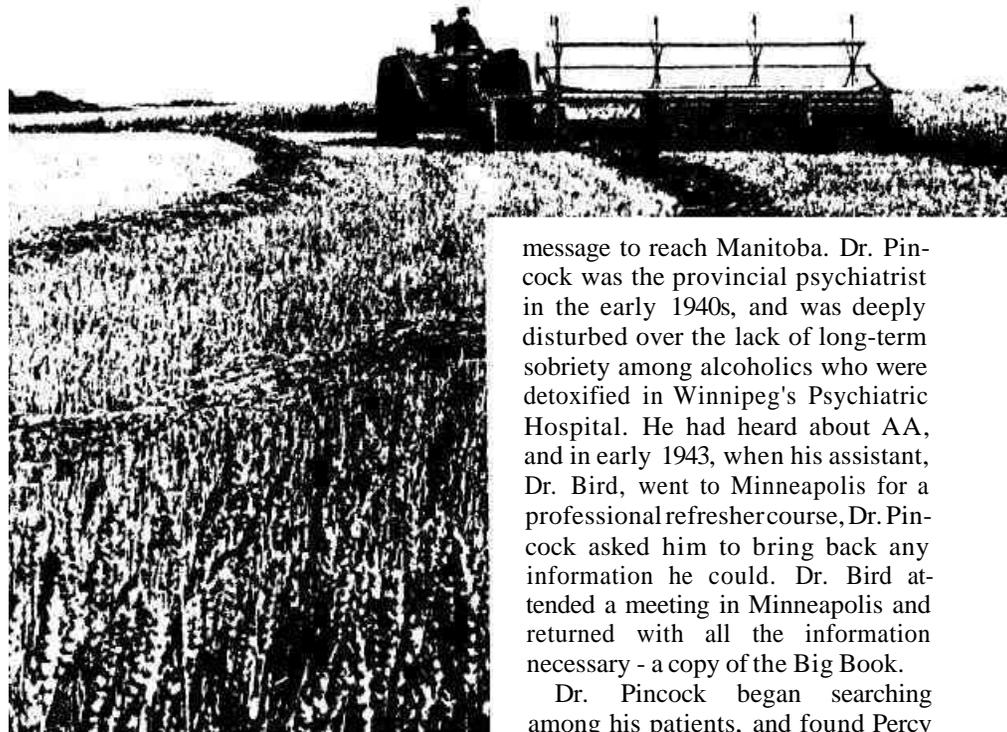
The first group consisted of Dave, Mary, and Jack, who met twice a week at Dave's home. In the spring of 1945, the group - by then 26 members strong - rented the first outside premises, at the Montreal Forum. AA in Quebec was on its way.

**French-Speaking Groups** In 1945, the first bilingual group was founded in Matane by Dr. Roland B., who attended a medical convention where Bill W. was one of the guest speakers and brought back a copy of the Big Book. At first, French members pre-



ferred to meet with the English groups in order to preserve unity; but it became apparent that some French-speaking drunks could not find enough help that way, and so French groups were started. The first such group in Montreal met in September 1947.

**French Literature** At first, French AAs had to rely on an outside publication, Joseph Kessel's "Avec les Alcooliques Anonymes." By the end of the 1950s, a few pamphlets were made available by volunteers, and a literature committee was created in 1961. The French translation of the



Big Book was launched in 1963, and after a series of typically AA trials and tribulations, Publications Française AA was incorporated in 1979 (see page 55). This body now translates and publishes all French literature in North America. The first issue of the Grapevine's French-language counterpart, *La Vigne AA*, came off press in 1965 and has been published bimonthly ever since.

## MANITOBA

Had it not been for AA's great medical benefactor, Dr. Alex T. Pincock, it could have taken years more for the

message to reach Manitoba. Dr. Pincock was the provincial psychiatrist in the early 1940s, and was deeply disturbed over the lack of long-term sobriety among alcoholics who were detoxified in Winnipeg's Psychiatric Hospital. He had heard about AA, and in early 1943, when his assistant, Dr. Bird, went to Minneapolis for a professional refresher course, Dr. Pincock asked him to bring back any information he could. Dr. Bird attended a meeting in Minneapolis and returned with all the information necessary - a copy of the Big Book.

Dr. Pincock began searching among his patients, and found Percy E. and Grettir J., who agreed to organize a group. Twelfth Step work at "Psycho" began at once, and soon AA number 3 came along. In January 1945, an organizational meeting was held at the hospital, and by the summer of 1945 there were 13 members, who held regular lunches and meetings at the Marlboro Hotel.

In December 1947, Winnipeg AAs held the first AA public information meeting in western Canada. More than 1,000 people attended, and an article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* brought in a stream of inquiries about the Fellowship. The seed was planted, and continued to grow.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

In Vancouver, Charles Welsh, a non-alcoholic, became interested in helping alcoholics when he lost his wife to the disease. After hearing about AA from his brother-in-law, Roland McK., who got sober in Sacramento, Charles Welsh talked with some business friends and with the Rev. Joseph Smith of the United Church. This group of men decided they needed a "guinea pig," and thought of Charlie B., a drunk who had gotten sober through the Oxford Group but could not seem to stay sober. One day in the summer of 1944, Charlie - sick and shaking - had a caller: Roland McK. Charlie stopped drinking immediately; he became a zealous Twelfth Step worker, and his home was a center of AA activity. The first meeting took place on January 12,

1945. A classified ad began to run daily in the city's newspaper, and AA was off and running.

## ALBERTA

**Edmonton** George C. found sobriety in a sanatorium in Vancouver, and when he returned home, he set out to find his former drinking buddies. Old-timers report that he literally dragged them away from their favorite hangouts and with threats and a lot of cajoling managed to sober some of them up. Strict membership rules were in force, and in an early letter George wrote: "It required a great deal of patience and perseverance to get the chapter formed under the right auspices, and although we have only eight members to date, they are all most sincere and anxious to help." The first group met in June 1945 in Edmonton's Merrick's Cafe, and in 1946 it moved to the "8th Street House," rented from the Alberta government for \$1 a year. From this base of operations came the seed of Edmonton's current central office.

**Calgary** Bill J., who had been precariously dry for a few months, heard about AA from his brother-in-law John, who read an article in *Your Life* magazine and sent away for the Big Book. Bill read it and got sober right away, but wanted to go it alone rather than starting a group. John persevered, putting Bill in touch with several prospects, and in October 1945 a group finally began.

From the "land of the midnight sun" southward to the U.S. border, to the seas and mountains of east and west, the AA message has reached the many people and varied cultures of Canada.



## THE MARITIMES

It has been said that AA came to the Maritime Provinces like the riptide on the Peticodiac. Although there were loners in the area before late 1946 and 1947, not until then did the tide hit, and it flowed almost simultaneously from four directions, with no real connection between them.

**Prince Edward Island** The message came to P.E.I. early in 1946, carried by a former Islander, Michael M., who had moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey, and joined AA. Father Eugene Murray of Emerald had arranged for five problem drinkers from Charlottetown and five from Summerside to meet with Michael M. at his residence. As a result of this meeting, Bill R. of Summerside, who most old-timers regard as AA's founder on P.E.I., wrote to New York for a Big Book about mid-March 1946. Two groups were formed in September and October of 1946, one in Charlottetown and one in Summerside, and a third started in Emerald in November.

**New Glasgow, Nova Scotia** It was Christmas 1946, and Fred P. of the New Orleans Group visited his home town of New Glasgow for the first time since he had found AA in the south. He passed on the message to some of his boyhood friends, and with an ad in the local newspaper he contacted more. Before Fred left after New Year's 1947, the Maritime Group held its first meeting.



**Halifax, Nova Scotia** Halifax might have been the first home of AA in the Maritimes, for in the summer and fall of 1946, three or four men had formed a group there. But the holidays proved too much of a hurdle and the group died. It was nearly a year later that Blake G., a salesman who got help in Toronto, was sent to Halifax on business, and got in touch with Dr. Walter K. At about the same time Al M., whose interest had been kindled by AA literature sent to him by his sister in Massachusetts, visited AA groups in Canada and the U.S. and recruited others when he returned. The efforts of these men resulted in a group that first met in November 1947.

**New Brunswick** AA in New Brunswick got off the ground through the efforts of Claire C., a Montreal AA, who came to Moncton in July 1947 to visit friends. Knowing of her recovery, they had spotted prospects for her, and the group she started before she left flourished and grew.

**Newfoundland** In January 1949, Jerry M., who had left Cornerbrook because he was fired for drinking and had found AA in Montreal two years before, was in town on business. He was put in touch with Jerry E., who was on a drunk at the time, and that was the beginning of AA in Newfoundland. Jerry E. stayed sober from that time on, but had little success in sobering up others until October 1949, when the first meeting was held in his room at the Glynmill Inn in Cornerbrook, with five members.



## SASKATCHEWAN

AA came to both Regina and Saskatoon at about the same time, in the spring of 1947.

In Regina, Sandy K. read a reprint of the Jack Alexander article, wrote the Alcoholic Foundation, and had his last drink in March 1947. He went to Calgary to attend meetings and find out how to start AA, and though he had little success at first, by November a group of four was meeting in his home. At about the same time, Bob H. wrote to Akron, received a Big Book, and by August had started his own group. At some point, the two groups got together, and reported a membership of 20 in early 1949.

In Saskatoon, Cam McK., who had joined AA in Calgary in May 1946, came to town as a sports reporter in May 1947. He stayed sober awhile as a loner, then started a group in 1948, which grew to 29 members within a year.

## YUKON TERRITORY

Dal D. was a major in the Canadian army who got sober in Vancouver in 1948, and was transferred to Whitehorse, Yukon. On his arrival, he was put in touch with Boyd J., who thought at first that at age 52, it might be too late for him to join AA! Assured that it was never too late, he chose sobriety, and went to work. His first public information effort, a request to a local editor to place an ad for AA in the paper, fell flat; the editor didn't see the need, because people who really wanted to stop drinking would do so on their own. Dal left the newspaper office and went across the street to the Anglican Church, where the rector received him joyfully - only the day before, he had counseled an alcoholic parishioner that his only hope was AA. These two met with Boyd J. on April 1, 1949. The rector managed to convince the editor to run an ad, and once the word began to spread, AA began to grow.

