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Frisco's "Derelicts" Mark Year of Sobriety

From San Francisco

The South of Market Group of San Francisco Fellowship of A.A., housed in the heart of San Francisco's notorious Skid Row and drawing almost exclusively from that area for its membership, became one year old on January 20, 1948, and observed its birthday with its regular meeting on that night.

Speakers included Major George Ferguson, chaplain of the Hunt Street chapel of the Salvation Army, also in the heart of Skid Row, where the first meetings of the group were held. Another speaker was Edward Wrenn, secretary of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which succeeded the Salvation Army as landlord-patron of the group and gave the group the use of the society's day shelter at 235 Minna Street as both a club-house and a meeting place.

The closing speaker of the evening was Juanita W., known to the boys of the group as the A.A. who "needled" the men of the San Francisco Fellowship to make the South of Market Group possible and who took part in the pioneering of the early meetings.

More than 4,000 men attended one or more meetings of the group during its first year. That large figure is explained by the transient nature of the neighborhood, which is the proverbial "wino belt" of the

city.

At the Salvation Army chapel, the group held two meetings a week. Since moving into the St. Vincent de Paul clubhouse, it has held four meetings a week - three in the evenings and one Sunday afternoons. The average attendance has been 150 men. At the last business meeting, 153 qualified as voting members, the requirements being sobriety for 30 days or more and attendance at at least one meeting a week. On that date, 84 members, all former derelicts of society, were usefully employed and had been sober from three to 12 months. An even half dozen had been sober since the group's first meeting.

In recent months, word of the apparent stability of a group in the heart of Skid Row has spread so widely that scores of A.A. visitors from all parts of the United States have attended South of Market meetings while in this city.

Members of the San Francisco Fellowship who took part in the pioneering of the group and gave the new members aid until the latter were ready to handle their own affairs, feel that in a small measure they have tried to meet the obligation set forth in the Big Book "to carry the message to alcoholics who still suffer." - *O.K.P.*