

February 1952

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNCIL



APPARENTLY a unique phase of AA activity is the Northern California Council. The Council meets four times each year for serious business, for knowledge of new approaches to AA, for renewal of old acquaintances . . . and for making a bit of sane and sober whoopee.

Conceived at a meeting of the Oakland Alano Club on March 23, 1948, the first Council was attended by interested AAs from most of the counties of the North. Since that first meeting the Council has been held in Sacramento, Stockton, San Jose, Vallejo, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Monterey-Pacific Grove, Oakland and San Francisco. On two occasions it has been called upon to make arrangements for special events . . . Bill's visit last Fall for the General Service Conference Assembly, to elect a delegate to the Conference. Then again in October, 1951 to arrange for a meeting held, "in gratitude for the Lasker Award." Although this is a loosely knit organization, it is constructed so that calls such as these can be answered quickly and effectively.

The loose structure of the Coun-

cil consists simply of a representative selected by each participating group. These men and women conduct the discussions and the business of the Northern California Council.

At the beginning and in line with the early-day thinking in San Francisco, the Council meetings were closed to AAs only. During the past five years, however, the trend has changed toward open meetings so that now, at the annual meetings more than 3000 AAs and their families and friends have been reported as those present. Attendance at the quarterly sessions has run up to more than 400.

The format of The Northern California Council is simple. An overall topic is usually chosen for each Council. Speakers are selected from the cities participating, who give their interpretations of different phases of the chosen subject. One of the outstanding features of the meeting is an hour's discussion of group problems. At times this has become quite hectic as members throw their views and problems out for discussion. Each group participating sends two official delegates, who are the only speakers recognized at the discussion sessions.

The fifth Annual Conference will be held next month in Sacramento, in conjunction with the Assembly called to select the delegates and the committee for Panel Two of the General Service Conference.

SAN QUENTIN

THE San Quentin Group was the first "inside" AA group to be recorded in the General Service Office. Since its beginning, more than nine years ago, groups have sprung up in prisons in all parts of the country.

It was Clinton T. Duffy, former Warden of San Quentin, who sparked the organization of the first prison group and San Francisco's AAs who carried the message inside the walls.

"It was apparent to us," said Warden Duffy, "that the alcoholic presented a problem which the prison program was not meeting."

A solution to the problem was sought by the prison officials and hope of its success came when the then young Alcoholics Anonymous was brought to their attention. After investigation and consideration the program was put into effect under the guidance of the Captain of the Yard who was more or less responsible for the morale of the men.

Of AAs working inside the walls, Warden Duffy has said, "The sponsorship and guidance of these men on the 'outside' evidences an in-

terest which has never before been expressed by any group of citizens in the problem of helping and associating with ex-convicts. Yes, these men offer practical and so human companionship for men on parole. This feature alone makes the program worthwhile."

It is said around San Francisco that the man who first contacted the AA group in behalf of the prison was a former prison chaplain, Julian Alco.

The rest is history. There are now 78 prison groups in the United States and one reported in South Africa. At present, San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, Vallejo, Marin County and Santa Rosa work on a rotation plan, visiting the prison.

The peninsula groups have now succeeded in gaining entrance to the Agnew State Hospital and the Stockton State Hospital. Santa Rosa has a program going at Mendocino State Hospital and there are groups in Folsom Prison and Soledad . . . so it goes . . . the steady carrying of the message . . . to the county jails and even to the old folks home.