

AA Grapevine, March 1995

The Grapevine, the **FBI**, **AND** **BOX 1980**

Have you ever noticed that the words "Box 1980" appear on every cover of the magazine, as well as on most Grapevine mail? Box 1980 is, in fact, the Grapevine's official name — the name by which it is registered with the U.S. Post Office. There's a story behind this.

Prior to 1974, the Grapevine was mailed to subscribers in an unmarked envelope which afforded anonymity to the recipients and allowed the Grapevine to take advantage of less expensive second-class postal rates. However, in 1974 postal regulations were changed and it became necessary for the full name of the publication to appear both on the cover of the magazine itself and on the outside of the mailing envelope — a move with severe implications for the principle and practice of anonymity.

When the Grapevine began, it was called just "the Grapevine." But one day in 1946, a call came in to the Grapevine office from the FBI. It turned out that a group of former FBI agents put out a newsletter called "The Grapevine," and they said they'd take legal action if the AA publication

didn't change its name. The AAs sought to work out a friendly compromise, so our "Grapevine" officially became "The AA Grapevine."

This event back in 1946 affected the Grapevine nearly thirty years later. The magazine was now forced by the new postal regulations either to pay higher third-class rates or, in order to keep the second-class rates, to print the full name of the magazine on the outside of the mailing envelope — thereby threatening the anonymity of subscribers. But a creative solution was found: change the official name of the publication to something other than "The AA Grapevine." Since PO Box 1980 had long been part of the Grapevine's mailing address and was familiar to subscribers, the name "Box 1980" was duly registered with the Post Office and now appears on the cover of the magazine and all official mail. (By the way, this box number was assigned by the Post Office and has nothing to do with the year 1980.)

The words "Box 1980," then, represent a cherished principle at the very heart of our Fellowship — the Tradition of Anonymity. ~