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Fragments of AA History

AA began in Canada in 1940, when the Rev. George Little in Toronto read a review of the Big Book and ordered a copy for an alcoholic who had resisted all other attempts at rescue. The Big Book turned the trick, and the two men went to work introducing AA to other Toronto drunks. The first AA meeting was held at the Little Denmark restaurant in January 1943, as a result of the efforts of another Toronto clergyman, the Rev. Percy Brice. Soon the AAs met weekly, then leased a clubroom — and the rest, as they say, is history.

By 1947, when Bill W. and Lois Visited Toronto, he spoke to a crowd of about 800 alcoholics, and the Fellowship had spread far beyond its Toronto beginnings.

The May 1951 issue of the Grapevine was devoted primarily to Canada, and in that issue, Bill remarked on the fact that "When AA travelers return from Canada they all report how much more they brought away

from Canada than they took in." The 10,000 AAs who attended the International Convention in Toronto in 1965, or the nearly 50,000 who celebrated AA's 50th birthday in Montreal in 1985, would heartily agree. And they might be surprised to read about the Canada described in that May 1951 Grapevine:

Canada Dry — that's not a mixer, that's a fact and a new way of life for 7,251 citizens of the Dominion of Canada in 299 groups who are dry through the Twelve Steps from Detroit's neighbor city Windsor, Ontario, to the far Yukon's iced-in Whitehorse and arctic Yellowknife on Great Slave Lake. Here in the vast northern half of the whole North American continent is a proportion of AAs in the scattered population almost exactly equal to that of the United States, despite a much later AA start, and despite great handicaps of distance, communications, language barriers, and festive traditions older

than Yankees know.

Even Nature conspires to Canada's wetness, not a Canada dry. Three oceans touch that far-flung land, and there are lakes that are inland seas, and rampant rivers. And lonely places and open spaces where the wee drop or the *vin petite* might comfort and solace. And miles of mellow grain whose yield is high in molten gallons to the broad acre.

But AA stands strong and secure northward from the touching point at Latitude 42 clear to Baffin Land. And from 1,200 members of Vancouver, British Columbia, on "the coast" to the two-member group of Weymouth the land's breadth away in Nova Scotia there is the steadfastness and pioneer courage that makes the Twelfth Step a living thing in the Dominion.

In the larger cities, intergroups and central committees serve wide areas, and by trial and error have worked out splendid programs for interchange of speakers, ideas, mutual aid. And in the hinterlands lumberjack, trapper, prospector, and salmon fisher employ ski and kayak and amphibian plane for "intergroup meetings" where perhaps four coffee cups will suffice the whole quorum assembled.

For the song of faith, the song of mutual service, rings in this rugged land up north. And there are singing names where these meetings come to order: Flin Flon, Manitoba and its North of 53 Group; Portage la Prairie; Petitodiac of New Brunswick;

Ministik of Kamsack in Saskatchewan; and Nipawin Group nearby; Tignish on Prince Edward Island; Mont-Joli of Quebec; Medicine Hat with its good medicine in Alberta; and not far away Red Deer Group, British Columbia's Oroville-Osoyoo's Group, and the camp meetings after a day's work on Powell River, B.C. and Thunder Bay at Ontario's Port Arthur, and the folks at Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia.

Hospital cooperation throughout the Dominion is generally good, most doctors are cooperative, and several penal institutions welcome visiting groups. Royal Canadian Mounted Police have suggested contact with AAs for several strays, including one far northern gent who compensated his two-week old home brew by dropping ice from a 10,000 year old glacier in it to give it age and tone.

AA has conquered vast spaces in Canada. The hand of understanding has spread across the wide land in faith and fellowship. From Frontenac to Fundy there is the firm clasp of friendship that says, "In this land, too, Easy Does It!"

Today, total AA membership in Canada is 82,949. Canadian AA is represented proportionally at the U.S./Canada General Service Conference and on the Board of Trustees, with 14 delegate areas, and three trustees. GSO New York serves both countries equally, and a French Literature Service translates AA literature into that language.