BEFORE THEY HAD AA

How some basic AA ideas were tried out
nearly a century and a quarter ago ...

The Washingtonians:

An AA colleague recently dropped
by at the Grapevine office to leave
a tattered and watermarked volume,
early a century old, called "Six
Nights With the Washingtonians."
Thought we might like to look
through it, he said, and see how close
drunks had come to hitting on AA
therapy that long before 1935. We
began to read.

In the spring of 1840, the author,
T. S. Arthur, relates, "there were as-
sembled in a drinking-house in this
city (Baltimore) six men, well ad-
vanced in years, who had for a long
time been confirmed drunkards, so
wedded to the love of strong drink as
to have found it almost impossible
to live without daily resort to it."
Though they met accidentally, and
had gone there to drink, there was,
that day, "in the mind of each a
strong desire to get out of his en-
slaved and wretched condition."
They talked. "Soon the feelings of
each became known to the others,
and they felt a sudden hope spring-
ing up in their minds—a hope in the
power of association. Sad experience
had proven to each that alone he
could not stand. But together . . .
they would conquer!" They organ-
ized a society, called it The Wash-
ington Temperance Society, and "de-
termined that they would increase
their number."

What happened to them? By an
AA "coincidence" there arrived at
the Grapevine the same week an ex-
ccerpt from a scholarly treatment of
"The Washingtonian Movement"
written by Milton A. Maxwell, Ph.D.
and published in the Quarterly Jour-
nal of Studies on Alcohol. The Wash-
ingtonians, Dr. Maxwell points out,
had certain notable features later in-
corporated into AA: (1) Alcoholics
helping each other (2) Weekly meet-
ings (3) Shared experience (4) Fel-
lowship of a group or its members
constantly available (5) A reliance
upon the Higher Power (6) Total
abstinence from alcohol. Unfortu-
nately, the movement eventually was
torn apart in the political and doc-
trinal warfare associated with the
temperance and abolition move-
ments. Also, The Washingtonians
lacked vitally important features of
AA, among which Dr. Maxwell lists:
(1) a program for personality change
(2) anonymity (3) a steady flow of
new ideas into the groups from out-
side their local memberships, and
(4) avoidance of causes and contro-
versies. Dr. Maxwell sounds a sol-
emn warning as to the vital impor-
tance of unabated, energetic Twelfth
Step work: "Whenever, and as long
as, the Washingtonians were working
hard at the reclamation of drunkards,
they had notable success and the
movement thrived and grew. This
would support the idea that active
outreach to other alcoholics is a fac-
tor in therapeutic success, and a
necessary condition for growth—and
even for survival."

The following pictures, taken from
the Arthur book, are typical of 19th-
century efforts to scare people sober.
They indicate that old J. Barleycorn
hasn't changed much in the past hun-
dred years.
Scene 2d—He is discharged from his Employment for DRUNKENness: They PAWN Their CLOTHes TO supply the BOTTLE.

Scene 3d.—An EXECUTION sweeps off The greater PART of THEIR FURNITURE: They comfort Themselves with the bottle.

Scene 4th.—Fearful Quarrels and Brutal Violence are the natural consequences of frequent use of the BOTTLE.

Scene 5th.—THE BOTTLE has done ITS WORK—IT has destroyed the infant and THE MOTHER, IT has brought THE SOn AND THE DAUGHTER to vice and to the street, AND has LEFT The father A hopeless MANIAC.