

June 1951

Conference Report

QUIETLY, effectively, with neither fuss nor fanfare — and therefore in the best traditions of AA — history was impressively written in New York City during the the four days of the First General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, April 19 through 22, 1951.

Thirty-seven delegates from half the states and provinces of the United States and Canada joined in deliberations and worked out advisory plans of action, in harmonious collaboration with the trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation and with staff members of the General Offices and *The A. A. Grapevine*. This was the First Panel of the Conference, strictly a geographical division, to be joined in 1952 by

a similar gathering of the Second Panel of the Conference — comprising representatives of the remaining states and provinces.

The high importance of subjects considered by the Conference seemed not only to justify, but to demand this measured and unhurried approach. This first group, chosen by an informal, yet an almost idealistic concept of the democratic process, came together for a cogent purpose. These well-chosen and representative members of AA gave initial impetus to a historic advance.

On behalf of AA members in their respective territories, these delegates met primarily to decide whether to accept the Third Legacy handed down from AA's founders,

Bill W. and the late Dr. Bob. The first two legacies, already held in trust by the membership, are the Twelve Steps of Recovery and the Twelve Traditions of AA.

The Third Legacy is ...the privilege of accepting full present and future responsibility for the General Services of Alcoholics Anonymous.

These services include The Alcoholic Foundation, the *AA Book*, *The A. A. Grapevine* and the diverse functions of the AA General Offices. These are the services that have enabled AA to serve and to grow into worldwide usefulness; the services upon which all future growth and, in fact, the very survival of AA depends.

Since it was new in concept and since it represented no more than half the territory covered by AA, it is manifest that the First Panel of the Conference could not presume to express the opinions of AA as a whole. This was a beginning. It will take several years, perhaps, for the full Conference to take final form and assume the responsibilities it proposes to bear. The delegates did, however, give unanimous opinion on vital phases of the overall AA Program.

First — they expressed wholehearted willingness to assume guidance of the AA policy and to take responsibility for financial support of The Alcoholic Foundation and its related services.

Further, the delegates were

unanimous in saying there should be no curtailment whatever in the services rendered by the General Office; they were in complete agreement that all the services were both vital and effective and that none of these services could be performed locally at all.

In this inaugural acceptance of the Third Legacy, AA, through this excellent cross-section of its membership, was stepping forward to assume responsibility for its own affairs. AA was beginning to come of age.

If any doubt lingers about the net results of the 1951 Conference, that doubt Concerns one point alone — whether it was the delegates themselves, or the Foundation Trustees and General Headquarters personnel who learned more of lasting value from the deliberations and the discussions. Without any Alphonse and Gaston pretenses, each group insists its own rewards were the greater.

After registration of delegates during opening day, April 19, the Conference prepared itself for the coming mutuality of expression by assembling that evening for a reception and informal discussion of Group problems, held on the main ballroom floor of the Commodore.

To give the delegates an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the physical aspects of the services they had come to discuss — the morning of Friday, April 20, was set aside for a visit



to the General Service Headquarters and *The A. A. Grapevine* Editorial office at 141 East 44th St., and to *The A.A. Grapevine* Downtown Business Office at 241 East Broadway. Following a luncheon at the Commodore, attended by the delegates, the other conference members and the wives who were present, the session immediately got down to its serious business — preceded by a cordial address of welcome by Bernard Smith, Chairman of The Foundation's Board of Trustees.

To lay the groundwork for discussion, Bill W. gave the group a concise historical outline of The Foundation, with which he combined an intimate interpretation of

the essential services rendered and a review of their expansion and development through the years.

From this point on, this account will make no attempt to maintain chronological sequence in the assembly's development. Events, major and minor, dovetailed too smoothly to permit any arbitrary separation by clock or calendar.

Hank G., Chairman of the General Service Committee and President of Works Publishing Inc., tendered the 1950 report on the financial status of The Alcoholic Foundation, Inc., and for the sake of clarity, re-defined it and its affiliated activities as follows:

"The Alcoholic Foundation, Inc., is a membership corporation whose general purpose is the rehabilitation of chronic alcoholics. This corporation owns the outstanding stock of Works Publishing, Inc., whose functions are the publication of the A.A. Book and pamphlets, and the operation of the Headquarters Office. The Founda-

tion also owns the beneficial interest in *The A. A. Grapevine, Inc.*, whose function is the publication and distribution of our monthly magazine."

Detailed operation of the headquarters operations were explained to the delegates, who learned that the total 1950 income of The Foundation was \$114,200, with total expenses of \$134,200, showing a loss for the twelve-month period of \$20,000.

The financial report was approved by the First Panel delegates — who expressed unanimous surprise that so much in service had been accomplished with so little expenditure of money. Of particular note in the summation was the fact that five years ago the General Office needed one paid worker for every three thousand AA members; today it requires one paid worker for every six thousand AA members.

It was suggested and unanimously approved that quarterly reports will henceforth be made on The Foundation's financial status, so that the General Service Conference may be kept abreast with its condition.

The First Panel delegates recommended to The Foundation's Board of Trustees that the 15% royalty on the A.A. Book provided for by the board and approved by the delegates be payable to Bill W., or to Lois W., if she should survive him, for their life-time — regardless of the expiration of any copyright.

It was also requested, by a vote of the delegates, that Bill W. make a recording of his talk on the Third Legacy, this to be available for general sale and all groups to be notified by the General Office when it is ready for distribution. To supplement this and other information on the General Services of AA — which compose the Third Legacy — it was voted that the October issue of *The Grapevine* be devoted to these services.

The Conference, having chosen its own Chairman and Secretary in the persons of Bernard Smith and Helen B., respectively, also named its own committees, with a New Yorker chosen as chairman in each instance save one, because of a closer familiarity, at present, with the relationship of the General Offices to AA as a whole.

These committees were:

Advisory Budget — Hank G., Chairman; Nic N., San Francisco; Bill D., Cleveland; Ward M., Springfield, Ill.; Ken G., Arkansas; Page D., Conn.

Report — Bob B., Chairman; Fiske McL., Muskegon; Tom S., Jacksonville, Fla.; Adam C., Toronto; Ralph B., New York.

Advisory Agenda — Earl T., Chairman, Chicago; Icky S., Houston; John R., North Carolina; Dave M., Missouri; Jack W., Virginia; Skeets G., Pittsburgh.

Advisory Trustees — Tom Y., Chairman; George R., Philadelphia; Mike E., Detroit; Charles B., Van-



couver; George C., Louisiana; Clifford W., Los Angeles.

At the instance of the Agenda Committee, it was voted that non-alcoholic members of the Board of Trustees be continued in office and that it was the unanimous sense of the Conference that such members will continue to be needed on the Board—a question which arose through the modest proposal of some of AA's non-alcoholic Trustees that they now step aside. It was the opinion of the Conference, also, that the alcoholic members of the Board of Trustees should have a fixed term of office.

Among other suggestions of the Conference which were voted, on motions originating under the Agenda Committee, were that in future years, all standard AA Textbooks and literature shall have Conference approval; that the temporary charter of the Conference, as it appears in the Third Legacy pamphlet, is approved as suitable for the next three years; that the 1952 and succeeding Conferences be limited to Conference members only, in the interest of efficiency.

Among the approved recommendations of the Budget Committee were that all AA groups be acquainted by the delegates with the Headquarters budget for 1951, which is \$107,000; that each delegate report to his state committee a summation of the financial report; that groups wishing to contribute to The Alcoholic Foundation give a

minimum of \$2 per member for the year 1951, and that the primary report to the area groups and AA members should be a visual presentation of the General Services rendered, combined with the recommendation that none of these services be curtailed.

Slides which graphically visualize the services will be available to each State Committee, and it was voted that each State Committee purchase its own series, should they so desire.

The Conference recommended to the Board of Trustees that a scroll be presented to the heirs of Dr. Bob and of Dr. W. D. Silkworth, expressing the appreciation of AA members for their years of dedicated service.

It was also unanimously resolved that the Conference go on formal record, by letter, as declaring its deep appreciation to Bobbie B. for her years of faithful service as Secretary of AA General Headquarters and the General Service Office. A similar expression was voted to Trustee Emeritus Willard Richardson for his intense devotion to AA and his untiring aid in forwarding its interests.

The final vote of the Conference was one of thanks—to the Trustees and Directors of The Alcoholic Foundation, Works Publishing and to the staffs of General Service Headquarters and *The A. A. Grapevine*, for providing the delegates with full information to take back

with them to their home groups.

States and Provinces represented in the First Panel, or 1951, session of The General Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous were: Alabama, Arkansas, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Tex-

as, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

To be invited in 1952, as the Second Panel, are: Alberta, Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Manitoba, Maritime Provinces, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Quebec, Rhode Island, Saskatchewan, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont and Wyoming.

