

From AA's Scrapbooks: 1942

Last month we referred to 1941 as a year of great AA growth, primarily resulting from Jack Alexander's Saturday Evening Post article published in March. The development of AA in that year was a tremendously stimulating and vital experience, but it brought with it many new and unanticipated problems. Not only were established groups confronted with an influx of new members but all over the country groups were springing up spontaneously. In most cases these were guided into life solely by the Big Book, letters from the central office or an occasional visitor from a more seasoned center. The need for a workable structural formula was urgent.

At that time there were no traditions, no services. Group autonomy in most cases meant group anarchy—with the blind leading the blind. In July of 1942 Bill started south on the beginning of a journey which

ultimately lead in 1946 to the formulation of the Twelve Traditions. Before this, however, two major events occurred which revealed again how alive our young movement remained in the awareness of the nation's press.

On April 14th, as one paper reported, "Detroit yesterday had a convention that made history. It was a convention of drunks, four hundred of the best and most accomplished drunks that Detroit, Cleveland, Akron, Flint, Toledo, Windsor (Canada) could muster." This "convention" was a testimonial dinner at Webster Hall in Detroit for Dr. Bob. During the preceding years when Bill was coping with the many growing pains of the movement, Dr. Bob, with the help of the indomitable Sister Ignatia, was working with intense dedication at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron. This was the medical heart of AA and from all over the country drunks

came to Akron to find the healing hands and spirit of Dr. Bob and Sister Ignatia. This dinner was held in tribute to the extraordinary labors of these two and was reported with warm good humor and appreciation from Detroit on all of the wire services throughout the country.

On June 17th the First Annual Dinner of AA was held in New York at the Penthouse (26th floor), 2 Park Avenue. Dinner \$1.00! Attendance was reported as 425. The principal speakers among the non-AAs were Dr. Silkworth, Dr. I. R. Sillman of the psychiatric division of the Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital, the Reverend Vincent Donovan, O.P. and W. S. Richardson. Once again we took up an amazing amount of space in the news columns and once again the reporting was respectful and friendly. Some of the headlines were pretty funny. The New York Herald Tribune, for example, announced "Ex-Alcoholics Hold Dinner, Give Credit to Self-Discipline," and the New York Daily News heralded, "424 Ex-Slaves Toast Defeat of Barleycorn." All of them expressed their delight and astonishment at the "regular bar with real liquor" maintained at the dinner for the press and other non-AA tosspots.

All of this public attention and growing acceptance was vastly encouraging though for the most part it came from the major centers and represented the glamor of a success-

ful experiment. Elsewhere in the country the story was a different one. Growing pains were acute. They had to be faced and solved or the movement, with all of its fine support, might wither from lack of properly defined principles and structural objectives. Bill journeyed south in July, making scheduled stops in all of the principal centers of AA activity—Florida, North Carolina, Alabama and Georgia. This was only the beginning. At each place AAs gathered to discuss their local problems and project plans for the future. Out of these meetings and from the combined regional experiences the Twelve Traditions were born.

Again the press clippings reveal a continued interest in our doings. We didn't have a chance to "die aborning"—if for no other reason than that every little development and every new group was instantly reported. Even when we were misinterpreted the results were generally more humorous than harmful. Later in Pittsburgh Bill was speaking to the local Chamber of Commerce and, in the course of his speech, commented that the Nordic races seemed more susceptible to the disease of alcoholism than the Latin races. This innocent observation was interpreted as, "Blondes are more inclined to become victims of drink than brunettes. . . there is some mysterious relationship between color and alcoholic allergy—says founder of AA."