



MARKINGS

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YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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“PIGEON” by Father G.

Let's have a little respect for that word—"pigeon." As I understand the story, the term "pigeon", to refer to a newcomer in Alcoholics Anonymous, came from Dr. Bob, one of the two co-founders of A.A. It was Dr. Bob's habit of saying, "I must see the pigeon in 218", or "I have a pigeon coming tonight." Suppose I told you that Dr. Bob didn't pick that term, referring to heavy social drinkers, out of the air. The word, "pigeon", has a very good "lexicographical" standing.

From all accounts, Dr. Bob was a very light sleeper. He loved to read when he could not sleep. One of his favorites was H. L. Mencken. The gruff Baltimore newspaperman wrote "The American Language." It was first published in 1919, revised and supplemented several times. This book was a natural for a man of Dr. Bob's temperament and training. Mencken and Bob were the same age, both were witty, had contempt for shallowness and conceit. Mencken, always a heavy drinker, reserved some of his harshest words for those he called the Prohibitionists. He referred to the 18th Amendment in capital letters—"The Thirteen Years."

When Mencken reaches the words which he introduces as: "terms still used by American boozers," he waxes eloquent. You can see he knows his stuff. He notes, first, the words about drinking imported from England, then those which were homegrown on this side of the Atlantic. Mencken points out, correctly, that Benjamin Franklin was the first American who wondered why tavern habitués never referred to a patron as being drunk. They were "soused", "corned", or "stewed." The genius, Ben Franklin, who gave us the lightning rod, the bifocal lens, the fuel saving stove, good postal service, also gave A.A. its "pigeons."

Franklin addressed himself twice in

his lifetime to the subject of synonyms for the word—drunk. (The American Slang Dictionary claims that there are more synonyms for "drunk" than any other word in American speech.) Ben first wrote about it when he was learning the printer's trade in his home town of Boston. He was working under his older brother, James, who did not have too high an opinion of Ben's talents. The 16 year old teenager was forced to write articles under the pen name of "Ms. Silence Dogood", and slip them under the door of the printshop. James Franklin admired the letters and printed them until he discovered that Benjamin had written them.

The two brothers quarrelled constantly. The next year, Ben ran away to Philadelphia, then the largest city in the colonies. At age thirty, as a successful owner of the Pennsylvania Gazette, Franklin returned to his boyhood hobby. The Silence Dogood letter had only 19 expressions, now the Philadelphia newspaperman had collected 225 words referring to fuddled imbibers. He published "The Drinkers Dictionary" which amused H. L. Mencken immensely.

Some members of A.A. may take offense at being compared to the lowly pigeon, take heart, Dr. Bob, Mencken and Franklin could have made you a bear, bee, cat, fox, toad, goose, rat, dog (or puppy), or a sow. Franklin was descriptive. He claimed that compulsive drinkers "eat a toad and a half for breakfast" or they are "dizzy as a goose" or "as good conditioned as a puppy." The actual entry in Franklin's dictionary which Mencken quotes, says that people who hung around taverns referred to drunks as being "PIGEON-EYED". Dr. Bob, knowing English grammar very well, referred to anyone who was "pigeon-eyed" lovingly as being "his pigeon."

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SERIALLY... THE ARCHIVAL HANDBOOK CONCLUDED (PART IV)

How many Archival Centers are necessary, or desirable, in a given state or (third legacy) area?

Since it is recommended that an archival project be placed under the guidance of an Archives Committee, responsible in turn to the State or Area Committee, it would seem a function of the Archives Committee to make a judgment as to the number or repositories needed in a particular area. It is certainly important to invite the widest participation of all groups and individuals in the activity of collecting early history artifacts and memorabilia. In most areas, probably one center would be sufficient; in large states or locations, where there may be several very early A.A.—beginnings towns and cities, perhaps there ought to be more than one repository. The Archives Committee can best make that decision, agreeable to every group in the locality.

In writing up local histories, or providing correspondence which will be shared between area and G.S.O. archives, how should the anonymity of A.A. members be handled?

We are often asked by members if, in collecting and writing up their local or area history, full names should be used of group founders, early members or group officers, regardless of whether the manuscripts are to be retained in the area only, or are also intended for sharing with G.S.O. and other area archives. Development of procedures seems to be a matter for local policy decision by the Archives Committee, but the necessity for protecting the confidentiality of correspondence and the anonymity of correspondence is without question an important consideration and a trust that falls upon

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INFORMATION EXCHANGE

ILLINOIS: The experience gained in the planning and implementation of the Archives project at G.S.O. has widened and deepened our original faith that one of the best ways to assure the future of the AA Fellowship is to nurture its past.

So far, we have set up two displays — at the Spring and State Conferences. They were such a success that we had to keep our room open longer than we had planned.

We received dozens of boxes of material from Trudy and Wally which they had accumulated over the years. Jack got us large loose leaf folders from GSO. They contained many newspaper clippings about AA. Some of them were sort of funny — for instance, one described the first breathalyzer as being two feet square.

We have received a First Edition, 3rd printing, of the *Big Book* and a 1949 *Secretary's Manual*. Some of these things were found in old book stores and, embarrassingly, some in junk shops.

We are trying to complete our collection of *Grapevines*. If you have any old *Grapevines*, send them to us. We may be able to use some of them to fill in our set. Duplicates will be donated back to some of our Districts. (Northern Illinois Area, Minutes of the Committee Meeting, January 17, 1987).

MINNESOTA: In January, I reported that this year the Archives committee will try to accomplish

eight things:

1. Develop a committee handbook and policy manual
2. Continue to collect oral and written histories
3. Hold regular meetings throughout the Area to encourage participation
4. Develop a working relationship with the Archivist
5. Provide archival material for the education of the fellowship
6. Give history talks and hold a workshop on Archives
7. Develop a liaison with other archives committees
8. Grow in our knowledge as a committee on how to preserve our history

In February, we had our workshop at the 2218 club. This consisted of a presentation from Marge R. who discussed the history of the 2218 with particular focus on women in AA; a presentation from Paul N. from the Nicollet group in Minneapolis; and between these two controverters we showed the film "Bill W. on the 12 Traditions". The workshop was not very well attended due to short notice. But for those who did attend, it was lively. (*The Pigeon*, S. Minn. Area Newsletter, 1987, Vol. VII, No. 2)

VERMONT: Don is working on a panel for the Convention-Longtimers with 25 or more consecutive years of sobriety. (Vermont Area Assembly, Minutes from Area Committee

Meeting, February 15, 1987)

CALIFORNIA: One lady with thirty-two years of sobriety was more than just a little bit keen about the many displays for they seemed to reawaken in her some happy and welcome recollections of her distant travels along the roadway to sobriety.

The Archival Center at 2917 MacDonald Ave., Richmond, continues to open on several Saturdays a month, including Archives Work Days on April 4 and 18. (CNCA Comments, *March, 1987, Archivist's Report by Herb J. (06)*)

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You may still resent being called a pigeon. Franklin may agree with you. He added this paragraph to his work, "The phrases in this dictionary are not (like most of our terms of art) borrowed from foreign languages, neither are they collected from the writing of the learned in our own, but gathered wholly from the modern tavern conversation of tiplers. I do not doubt but there are many more in use; and I was even tempted to add a new one myself under the letter B, to wit "brutified." But, upon consideration, I feared being guilty of injustice to the brute creation, if I represented drunkenness as a beastly vice, since it is well known, that the brutes are in general a very sober sort of people."

Dr. Bob would agree—pigeons don't drink.



The pictures of the display cabinets were taken immediately prior to the move of the Toronto Intergroup office from the mainfloor location in a store at 272 Eglinton Ave. West to a 5th floor location at 234 Eglinton Ave. East, Toronto, Canada. The new accommodation is much better for our purposes.



The carrying case is roughly 4 feet x 4 feet. It has a "mat or carpet" backing on which the pictures, which are velcro-taped, fit and can be changed quite easily.

Thos. H.

WE NEED YOUR HELP DEAR FELLOW A.A. MEMBERS:

This coming March the building at 706 First St. Modesto, Calif. will be celebrating 35 years continuous service to A.A. and the suffering alcoholic.

From what we have been able to find, we know the following:

1. First Group was started here in March 1953. They held meetings and the building was opened for the suffering and recovering alcoholic as a drop in center.
2. As time went on it prospered into the Alano Club in the Modesto area. A.A. meetings continued to flourish there.
3. A few years later the Alano Club was moved to another building and we became Modesto Fellowship. We are commonly known as First Street.

We have some questions we are eagerly seeking answers for:

1. We understand that Hole In The Ground Group in Southern California has had to move. Is there any other building that has housed A.A. meetings longer than 35 years in California. We also wish to hear from fellowships throughout the United States and around the World that have been in the same building longer than 35 years.
2. We wish to hear from people who started their sobriety here and progressed on in other cities, states, or around the world.
3. We would really love to hear from anyone that was here in and around 1953 when the Fellowship

began. Please let us know what it was like then.

On March 5, 1988 we are having a 35th Anniversary Celebration here. We pray that we will hear from people who started their sobriety here; that can come back and share their Experience, Strength, and Hope with us.

At this time we are actively putting together fund raisers for this Celebration. We have commemorative T-Shirts on sale for \$8.50 and Serenity Prayer Posters for \$10.00.

Looking forward to hearing from those who started their lives over from here and other groups.

Chip M.
Secretary

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all A.A. archivists and committees.

At G.S.O., the group histories and correspondence files (going back to 1939) contain full names and addresses. When new material arrives from groups and individuals, we continue to protect the anonymity of individuals by placing the incoming material in its classified category and monitor carefully each occasion when research permission has been granted a person to review the history files.

Also, while adhering to the tradition of first name and last initial may be preferable, confusion can occur when two or even three people have the same first name and last initial.

It has been pointed out that our G.S.O. publications, as well as *Box 4-5-9* and the *Grapevine*, carry only first name and last initial identification. This precaution is especially necessary because these journals may reach outside the Fellowship, whereas our classified archival material is not normally available to either A.A. members or the public.

This concludes 4-part reprint of our Archival Handbook. Copies may be obtained from G.S.O. Archives.

ARCHIVES DISTRICT 08 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

This is the fourth article in a series of how AA got started in Contra Costa County.

The Tuesday night Grant Street Group (originally known as the St. Michaels Group) was started in July of 1976 by Ann B. and in July of 1977, the Friday night Candelight Grant Street Group was also started by Ann. These were both open discussion meetings and operated as separate groups. Originally both met at St. Michaels Episcopal Church, 2900 Bonafacio Street, Concord. The start of both groups was encouraged by Father Mac (a non-alcoholic), rector of the church. However, in early 1981 a new rector was assigned to the church and for unknown reasons the groups were asked to leave. Father Kevin was then instrumental in finding a new meeting place for the two groups in the school rooms of the Queen of All Saints Church at 2390 Grant Street, Concord. In early 1982 after another change in rectors at St. Michaels Church, a closed discussion group was started there by Mike G. It was known as the Michaels Group and met on Sundays at 7:30 pm.

The Gut Level — Young Peoples Group was started in 1975 by "Pony Tail" Bob L. who wanted "A Gut Level" meeting in this county similar to the one he had started in Hayward when he lived there. It met at 7:30 pm on Sunday evenings. The first meeting place was the AIRS Drop-in Center in Martinez on Blue Ridge Drive. The chairs were bean bags and the distinctive feature of the group was that each member could talk as long as they wanted and everyone had a chance to talk which resulted in some very long meetings. This group moved to the main conference room at Mt. Diablo Hospital in 1981. The Love in Service Group was started by John M. in 1976. This was an A.A. book study group meeting on Monday evenings. The first meeting place was the Most Precious Blood Church on Oak Grove Road, Concord, from there the group moved to the California Savings and Loan Building at 675 Contra Costa Blvd., Pleasant Hill, and in 1979 to 2121 Meridian Park Blvd., Concord, and became a closed discussion group meeting Wednesdays at 3:30 pm.

RESEARCH PROJECT ON EARLY BLACK MEMBERS OF A.A.

As you know the initial idea's began when Regional Trustee, Garrett T. stressed the need for a history of Black members to be included in the Archives at G.S.O. during a sharing session one Board week-end. He had prepared a written report on Black Groups and Members in the Washington, D.C. area and proposed that it be expanded to include A.A. as a whole.

I was assigned to the Archives Trustee Committee in January and was asked to continue the Project. I was delighted and immediately set out to contact members who could help identify early Black members and Groups. As with everything in this Fellowship, the response has been tremendous from as far away as California, Arkansas, Illinois. The names and groups are pouring in.

To help co-ordinate the data, I have enlisted some local A.A. members who have background in Social Research. I also have kept close contact with Garrett T. and have consulted with him in the preparation of a questionnaire that will be distributed along with tapes to those members that will provide an oral history. A compilation of written data will also be developed in order that a comprehensive body of information can be obtained. In addition to Garrett, I am also getting help from a variety of members. Joe McQ. from Little Rock and Bill W. from the Evans Avenue Group in Chicago have forwarded groups, people, etc., all of whom will be contacted.

During Conference Week I have been given some time to speak to the delegates to ask their help in identifying Black members and groups in their areas. I also hope to have a similar request in Box 459. As the information comes in I will most probably ask for some help in organizing it into some semblance of order.

The Project itself is fascinating, not only am I learning a particular aspect of the fellowship, but my sense of A.A. as a social movement, became much more acute. "But that's another story."

As the material develops there will

be the need for planning and co-ordinating with Archives. Also, I will make periodic reports to keep you updated.

I will appreciate any ideas and thoughts that you or anyone at G.S.O. may have that can help move this project forward.

Thank you again for asking me to carry on the Project.

Sincerely, Harold G.

FOR YOUR COMMENT

PROJECT ON HISTORY OF EARLY BLACK MEMBERS IN A.A.

For persons using questionnaire for taping, feel free to modify questions or response's to whatever feels comfortable to you. The object is to relate your experience as an A.A. member who happened to be Black. This information will be cataloged and stored at the General Services Office for future reference.

Please begin by stating your *Name, Group, and City & State* where you are now a member.

- How did you yourself get to A.A.?
- Where did you hear about it?
- Did you have a sponsor; if so, how did it help you as a newcomer?
- What contributions did you yourself make to the Fellowship's growth — and don't be unnecessarily modest!
- When was A.A. started in your town or area? Where meetings were held: homes, churches?
- By whom? Were there early members who especially contributed to the growth and success of the group?
- How were they started: i.e., offshoot of the parent group, quarrel or split with first or main group, one person starting group?
- What was A.A. like in the early days in your area?
- How did you contact new members? How was 12th Step work done?
- Did you seek cooperation of local community and professional agencies — ministers, doctors, law enforcement agencies?
- Who were the founders and group officers of the early groups?
- How often were meetings held, what kind of meeting format was used? (Speakers, open meetings, closed discussion, any public meetings held?)
- Were there any special problems that arose during the early years — growing pains, etc.?
- What was the group's first name — did it change, if so when? More than one change of name? What is the present name of the group?
- Do you know how the first group was received by the community when it was started?
- Do you think your group or groups has/have had influence in your community? Has attitude of your local professional people, particularly towards alcoholism, been changed by contact with the local members?
- Conferences or Conventions held? When started, how often held, well attended?
- When did clubhouse (if you have one) get started, and under what circumstances? Any problems developed? How solved?
- Was there any opposition to A.A. or intergroup feuds in your area — would you elaborate?
- Intergroup or Central Office in your area or community? Do you know when it was started? How? Any problems?
- Do you celebrate anniversaries, individual and group? How?
- Is there Al-Anon in your community? Good relations? Alateen?
- Have you experienced growth in your group, in your area? — Who approaches A.A. today: more young people, women, minorities? Are all welcome? Any special problems?
- "Outside Agency" in your area? What is your relationship with it? Many referrals, any problems with these?
- Do you participate in state or regional get-togethers: conventions, conferences, forums, etc.?
- How has A.A. changed, if it has, since you first encountered it?