

Introduction to Dick B. History Articles CD Rom 35 Articles on Alcoholics Anonymous History

A.A. Articles, and Books on Its History—Why?

by Dick B.

How the Recent Enthusiasm Began August 2002

In one sense, interest in A.A. history began shortly after Dr. Bob died and Bill introduced the Twelve Traditions that would end founder-control. Bill convened the St. Louis Convention and brought in speakers and personages the rank and file had scarcely seen. People like Reverend Sam Shoemaker, Father Ed Dowling, and many others from the earliest A.A. days. Bill capped it off with his *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

About the same period, Bill, his secretary Nell Wing, and others began taping oldtimers like T. Henry and Clarace Williams who had slipped between the cracks from their early leadership. But where was the Akron story? Where were the details about Quiet Time, Shoemaker, the Oxford Group, Anne Smith, and the books of early A.A.? And where was the Bible—the Good Book that was so important that A.A.’s basic ideas were taken from it? The Good Book whose use was so commonplace that some favored calling A.A.’s fellowship The James Club (after the Book of James which was so popular among the pioneers)? They just weren’t items of interest.

Then came an apparent resurgence of interest in our history about the time of Bill’s death. Robert Thomsen published his book *Bill W. Lois Wilson wrote Lois Remembers*” Ernie Kurtz did his Ph.D. dissertation on the history of A.A. and called it *Not-God*. And Bill Pittman was assiduously collecting books pertaining to the *spiritual* roots of A.A.—the Bible, the Oxford Group, and Reverend Sam Shoemaker. He wrote a dissertation called *AA The Way It Began*, went into the publishing business, and set the stage for a new era. But all these works just skimmed the surface of our Biblical ideas and early Christian Fellowship and the roots that contributed to the early program’s principles and practices.

Then came the recovery publishing craze. Everyone seemed to want in on the act. “Recovery Bibles,” crammed with Scripture and Steps, began to be published by major Christian publishers. Recovery stores were popping up in many cities. And even the treatment programs—funded to the max by the insurance support—began to need books, “recovery” itself, and a team of “professionals”—sometimes called “two-hatters” (an A.A. hat and a “professional” hat). For a time, there was lots of money in the game. But still the Akron story, the Bible, Anne Smith, Sam Shoemaker, the Oxford Group program, and much much more, were lying in the discard heap. You didn’t read about them in or out of A.A. literature. And nobody seemed to have much interest in digging through the rubble.

No one, that is, except Frank Mauser, the General Services archivist in New York, who had succeeded Bill's secretary and A.A.'s first archivist, Nell Wing.

Frank Mauser (now deceased) was an alcoholic with some twenty years of sobriety under his belt. He was kind. He was attentive. He was accessible and responsive. He was knowledgeable. He seemed to have befriended most of the people who were candidates for A.A. history quests. And he supported the search for history. In fact, he fathered (and generously acknowledged Carl Sandburg as the source) a phrase which has been adopted by everyone who even thinks he or she has an interest in archives or history: The phrase was: "Whenever a civilization or society perishes, there is always one condition present. They forgot where they came from."

And A.A. seemingly had! Or was well on its way.

Finally, a curious former attorney, beset with alcoholic zeal, entered the scene and found a plethora of holes. Not the evidence, just the holes. At first. And what a scene it was. Lack of publications about A.A. History and its Biblical roots. Distaste for the Oxford Group and its founder Frank Buchman. Foggy memories of Reverend Sam Shoemaker. Virtual oblivion for Dr. Bob's wife Anne Smith. The myth that Dr. Bob's early Christian reading had been "given away." No real repository of the early literature except the books that Bill Pittman had been piling up in his offices and at Hazelden. Widespread rejection of "religion" in favor of "spirituality;" "Christianity" in favor of "meetings;" and the "God-thing" in favor of "Something" or "not-god" in the recovery field. And there was burgeoning competition from ill-informed "Christ-centered" groups, rational recovery groups, New Age proponents, self-help organizations, and a host of "anonymous" groups—offering anonymity and Twelve Steps for every malady that could possibly be called an "addiction." A sorry scene, it appeared, for any renewed search for the Creator in a Twelve Step group. In fact, the Creator had new names other than the name He himself had specified in the Bible, *Yahweh*: Instead, names for "a" god or "any gods" like "groups," "group of drunks," "good orderly direction," radiators, tables, chairs, doorknobs, lightbulbs, the Big Dipper, goddesses, "someones," "somethings," and even Ralph! Lots more too, like "him, her, or it" and Gertrude. In place of spiritual history and roots, the curious attorney found the foregoing dumped in the holes. What a scene!

Significant New Beginnings in 1990

For me, the curious former attorney—the "recovered" alcoholic, the quest for our spiritual history began. And I found I was not alone. Dr. Bob's kids had been busy having their story written for them. It was called *Children of the Healer*. Mel B., who had been writing for the Grapevine, for A.A. itself, and for Hazelden, had put together his book on spiritual roots called *New Wine*. Mary Darrah had apparently received some Jesuit financing for her Roman Catholic approach, and published *Sister Ignatia*. Clinging to some memorabilia he had received from Clarence Snyder's widow Grace, Mitch K. had been working on the Clarence Snyder story for years, but had not yet completed it. And Bill Wilson's long-time secretary and archivist Nell Wing was having her story published: *Grateful to have been There*." Still others, like Earl H., had been chewing away

from a different angle, collecting all kinds of important religious and other literature early AAs read, and, in some cases, privately publishing the materials.

It was a fertile field for me in 1990. Because, at the beginning, every single one of these searchers was sharing freely of what he or she had been receiving—as far as information was concerned. And the doors of our history repositories were opened to me. Dr. Bob's kids and Nell Wing were as generous with their time as could be. The Seiberling and Williams heirs were equally helpful. The Oxford Group activists of the early days came to the fore in droves—thanks largely to T. Willard Hunter, the A.A. friend and the Oxford Group activist, who had been interested in A.A.'s Oxford Group link for many years. Sam Shoemaker's wife, daughters, and associates furnished me with liberal quantities of information and manuscripts. The wife of Shoemaker's assistant minister (Mrs. W. Irving Harris) provided me with her husband's entire group of Sam Shoemaker's books and articles. The archives of GSO, Stepping Stones, Dr. Bob's Home, the archivist at Dr. Bob's Home (Ray G.), the Akron Intergroup (Gail L.), Calvary Church in New York, Calvary Church in Pittsburgh, the Episcopal Church Archives in Texas, Hartford Seminary, Princeton Alumni Archives; and the private materials of Oxford Group old-timers and sparkplugs James and Eleanor Newton in Florida; Garth Lean, Michael Hutchinson, and K .D. Belden in England; Parks Shipley, Howard Blake, Jim Houck, Charles Haines, George Vondermuhll, Jr., Willard Hunter, and many other early Oxford Group people in America, as well as the Moral Re-Armament Headquarters in Washington, D.C., were freely shown to me.

Then there was my reading of some 100,000 pages of materials; the collecting of those which could be of future use; and the analysis of what they all meant in terms of the A.A. program.

Fortunately, about 1980, A.A. itself had previously taken an interest in what was rapidly slipping away. About 1980, it sent Niles P. around the U.S. to assemble facts for *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*; and that wonderful resource was published. It didn't contain the details. But it did affirm the roots and offered endless jumping off points for further research into the Akron story. *Pass It On*, written substantially by Mel B., was published by A.A. World Services in 1984. Again the Biblical details were missing, but the resources gave great promise for further research.

The Leaps and Bounds in more than a Decade

Lots of things happened to me from 1990 on. Frank Mauser spoke before a large A.A. audience in Marin County, California. Frank shared the podium with me and heard me present what I had begun to find about the Oxford Group connection with A.A. Frank told me, "You have a book in you, Dick." That's all it took; and now there are nineteen, not counting the revisions. I began to see that there were many roots that had not been researched or put together in any significant way at all. Each called for travel, interviews, analysis, reading, and so on if the picture were to emerge as a whole. And, but for the help of some generous private benefactors, at my own expense.

First, came my discovery at the home of his daughter Sue that Dr. Bob's reading and library not only still existed in the hands of his family, but was extremely informative. Then, thanks to Dr.

Bob's daughter, I was able to get a copy of Anne Smith's Journal and see what a walloping impact her work and writing had produced and shared with the pioneers. This was followed by my Oxford Group books on the group itself and on "Quiet Time." Then by my bibliographical material on the books early A.A.'s read. Then by my most widely sought and read title, *The Good Book and The Big Book: A.A.'s Roots in the Bible*. That book has been reprinted and revised several times. It has given rise to talks at seminars, conferences, panels, radio shows, and even community television.

Before long, I met Grace Snyder at one of the spiritual retreats her husband Clarence had founded. I spoke and she spoke at the retreat. And I learned from her own comments to me that what I had found in and about our history was, in large measure, what she had heard from her husband Clarence Snyder who taught her the early A.A. picture. She shared with me what she had learned; and the information became my book *That Amazing Grace*.

There have been lots more books and articles. The more I write, the more I find, the more I write, and the more I find. And here, to introduce the series of articles, are the results:

- ! Nineteen published titles on A.A. history
- ! More than 110,000 books in print
- ! More than 173,000 visits to our website since 1995
- ! A collection of research materials numbering over 23,900 items
- ! Videos explaining the foregoing
- ! Audio tapes of talks all over the United States
- ! An ongoing series of more than 34 articles—the subject of this introduction.

And Now: The Internet Bonanza

Each year since the 1995 International Convention in San Diego, I have been privileged to present a history seminar at The Wilson House, East Dorset, Vermont. At one of these seminars, Ozzie Lepper, Jeff F. (an assistant), Bob J. (one of my sponsees), and I worked on a dream to put all of the historical materials on the internet for free—and to be viewed for free.. Ozzie had been working on his dream to make the Griffith House (where Bill Wilson had been raised and next door to the Wilson House) an accessible library for the spiritual materials. And Jeff believed we could link that library and our historical collections on Maui and put them out free on the internet. Making them the first real access that AAs have had to the evidence of their early program in more than sixty-five years.

Lots of this has now been accomplished—in a somewhat different way. And then a new history

activist entered the scene. That A.A. zealot, “L. D.,” had already begun managing (free of charge) his website for A.A. history. He wasn’t afraid to mention God, our Biblical roots, the Oxford Group, or the host of different people and ideas that were fast circulating in the A.A. fellowship.

He didn’t censor the materials. He didn’t ban any particular writing or approach. He just laid it all out for all to see.

I think at the time he began, he had a few over 2,000 visits to his site. But he began really reaching out. He submitted his site to many internet sources and engines. I linked his site to mine and featured it. The result was electric. And you can now see this most unusual, unique, and comprehensive collection of A.A. history sources that can be found on the net. It’s free. It’s diverse. And it’s the product of continuing hard work. L.D.’s visits have shot up to 20,000 plus because of the valuable content.

My own emails, phone calls, faxes, letters, website visits, and personal acquaintances demonstrate to me the immense interest that now exists in A.A. history. In connection with this series of articles, I was asked by L.D. to explain why we should study A.A. history. And here are some of my reasons:

- ! Because it’s there. Just like Mount Everest.
- ! Because it’s been ignored for over fifty years.
- ! Because the early recovery rates (75 to 93%) were astonishing and deserve thorough reporting on what was really going on in early A.A.
- ! Because many AAs want to incorporate the biblical elements of early A.A. in the 1930's into their own A.A. spiritual walk today.
- ! Because so many of the mis-understood words and phrases in A.A. can actually illuminate, rather than confuse, once a person learns their real source and meaning.
- ! Because: If you want to know and understand the Creator *Yahweh*, if you want to understand the necessity for coming to Yahweh our God through His son Jesus Christ, if you want to learn the real program upon which the pioneers AAs relied—taken from their source, the Good Book—then you will want to learn and use A.A. history in your march toward sobriety, “cure,” the abundant life,” and an informed obedience to God’s will

END.