

MARKINGS

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The Campfire Group

The practice of giving chips, medallions or some token of sobriety—particularly to newcomers—has been going on since the 1940s. The Mt. Vernon Group in New York, I understand, gave different colored poker chips to mark 1, 3, 6 and 12 months of sobriety.



Wooden chips from the Campfire Group in Mammoth Lakes, California. The pine chips measure approximately 2" in diameter and are about 3/4" thick. The one on the left is threaded with a leather thong.

I used to go to Mammoth Lakes, California, high in the Sierra Mountains, in the summer for the climate and the wonderful trout fishing. While they had several A.A. groups, there was one which I think was unique, the Campfire Group. This group held its meetings around an open campfire in a natural pine grove on Monday nights.

This group developed its own version of sobriety chips, which were handmade by one of the members. I had the pleasure of receiving two of these wooden chips for Birthdays I celebrated there. Unfortunately, the Campfire Group was put out of business in 1992 by neighbors complaining to the city about the fire hazard of the campfires.

Don McL., Burbank, California

History of A.A. in Lubbock, Texas

This brief history of the beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous in Lubbock has been compiled with the help of people who were there at that time, plus our memories of what the first members told us. A few of the wives of early

members are still around. My main source of information comes from Searcy W., who lives in Dallas, and Joe and Jackie T. I also have some notes from Don B. of Slaton, plus some notes of early events kept by Bill W.'s wife, Jane.

Don's notes indicate that five members of A.A. met, near 19th and Avenue X, in a house that belonged to the mother of Joe P., on August 18, 1946. On September 27, 1946, the first official meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in Lubbock was held at Tate Sanders's Tire Shop on Avenue H. According to Don's notes there were 16 members present, including Franklin A., Stu B., Frank B., Tommy B., Don B., Bob D., Bill G., George H., Weldon J., H. J. J., Truman M., Joe T. P., Tate S., Bill W., Searcy W. and Jim W.

Members brought experiences from other towns: Searcy had met some A.A. folks in Dallas and he had been sober since May 10, 1946. Bill W. had met some A.A. folks in Ft. Worth and had had his last drink on May 14, 1946. George H. had gone to some A.A. meetings in Kansas City, Missouri and had been sober about the same length of time.

The September 27 meeting was significant in that the group was organized and George H. was elected secretary. The group continued to meet in the tire store for a while, and on December 16, 1946 the group elected a "Board of Directors." Sometime later, possibly in early 1947, the group moved to the basement of a church located at 16th and J in Lubbock. It was at this location, from 1947 to 1951, that Alcoholics Anonymous really took off in Lubbock, and indeed, in all of West Texas.

The group flourished, and they played dominos and cards and eventually installed slot machines, the purpose of which, of course, was to give sobering-up alcoholics something to do in order to stay sober. In the process the group accumulated some extra money. Membership grew rapidly and was estimated at between 200 and 300 people in the late 1940s. Most of the early members were men; the wives called themselves the "Auxiliary." They had accumulated some extra money and enthusiasm ran high. Most important was the fact that many very heavy drinkers were staying sober and remained sober during the remainder of their lives.

In 1951 the group moved to a location at 5th and N, where they built a basement and provided a foundation strong enough to erect a seven-story building. The plan was to build a hospital at the location for the treatment of alcoholism. A member of the group by the name of Henry S. was a contractor, and another member, Carl H., supervised the building project. The group had accumulated a considerable sum of money, and they also borrowed some more money for the project.

One night, possibly in 1953, the city of Lubbock was invaded by Federal Agents, who did not believe that so-called

private entities, such as the VFW, AM VETS or Alcoholics Anonymous, deserved to be exempt from local laws prohibiting gambling, even among their own members. The direct result of this was that the local A.A. group lost its primary source of income, and thus their plans for sobering up the world had to be altered! (The group did salvage its custom of holding bingo games in the building and this practice continued until May 11, 1970, when the tornado struck Lubbock.)

The slot machines had helped the group pay off the indebtedness incurred when it moved to 5th and N, but it did create problems – “growing pains.” By this time the Traditions had been adopted, and the need for them was recognized and appreciated. In spite of mistakes, then, the Lubbock A.A. community became a very important and positive influence on the development of Alcoholics Anonymous in the West Texas area. The enthusiasm created during those early days of A.A. in Lubbock, at 16th and J and at 5th and N, will surely go down in history as being a “fantastic” period in the development of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Sometime in 1958 or 1959, some folks left the group and formed a new group, which was eventually called the Central Group. They first moved to a building near 19th and Q, and after a year or so, the group moved to 50th and W. This is the current location of the Central Group, which is still very active today. I believe it was Kenneth W. and Randy R. who were instrumental in getting the Lubbock Southwest Group started. They met in the Second Baptist Church. This group is also still active. Tom H. and Charlie G., who were members of the 5th and N Group, were primarily responsible for starting “Home Groups,” whereby members met in various homes on a given night every week. This practice is still in effect today.

After the Lubbock tornado hit the area of 5th and N and destroyed most of the neighborhood, a program was implemented which allowed the city to buy and redevelop the area. This was called the Lubbock Civic Center Disaster Redevelopment Project. The 5th and N Alcoholics Anonymous building was not destroyed (the only damage the building suffered was to the roof-mounted air conditioning and to some of the plumbing and electrical installations located on top of the building), but it was sold to the city. There was an incorporated entity composed of A.A. members which owned the 5th and N facility, and this corporation took the proceeds of the sale of the property and bought and developed the facility near 34th and Memphis. This became the home of the Hub of the Plains A.A. Group, which is affectionately known in the Lubbock A.A. community as the “Hub.” I do not know whether the name, Hub of the Plains had been used before this time. Of course, the city of Lubbock, Texas, has been known for many years as the “Hub of the Plains.” One of the conditions listed in the charter of the Hub of the Plains Group was that there would be no games of any kind, not even dominos. That rule is still in effect today.

I will not attempt to list, or even count, the number of groups of Alcoholics Anonymous that are now located in the Lubbock area. Weekly A.A. meetings would certainly number in the hundreds. They are all either the direct or indirect descendants of the first three groups: Number One at Tate

Sanders’s Tire Shop, Number Two at 16th and J, and Number Three at 5th and N. Many of the groups have as many as 20 or more meetings per week, as well as numerous Al-Anon and Alateen meetings. No one knows for sure how many people have been helped by the program of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Lubbock area since 1946, because no records are kept and each group is autonomous except in matters that affect A.A. as a whole, but I believe it would be safe to estimate the figure to be in the thousands. We could add to this the large number of people who have been adversely affected by others with a drinking problem, such as parents, children and spouses.

In short, Alcoholics Anonymous is alive and well in Lubbock, Texas, and as a direct result of this fact, plus some personal effort by me and my family, I have not had a drink of alcohol since January 1, 1964. For this I am grateful.

Brian G., Lubbock, Texas

Sixty Years of A.A. in Connecticut

The Archives of Area 11 (Connecticut) had a superb chance to shine when two anniversaries for the area and for the town of Greenwich were celebrated on May 21, 1999. The celebration took place at the theater of the State University of New York (SUNY) in the form of an Open Meeting. Widely publicized though the area, it attracted some 800 A.A.s, including some members from groups in Southeast New York. The meeting was held at SUNY because no facility in Greenwich could handle that size crowd.

Five members of the Area 11 Archives Committee trucked their materials down from upstate Connecticut (Middlefield) and assembled them in time for the premeeting coffee and milling around with friends in the theater’s spacious lobby.

Dozens of people inspected the material intently. The archival exhibits showed that the first group formed in Connecticut met in May 1939 and was the third meeting in A.A. history, following Akron and New York City. And that made it the first meeting in Connecticut. It was soon followed by groups in Fairfield County (now District 6) and in Hartford.

The centerpiece of the exhibit was a four-panel standing display, with one panel for general A.A. history, another for Greenwich A.A. history, a third for Hartford A.A. history, and a fourth for High Watch Farm, a rehabilitation facility in Kent, Connecticut with a



A section of Area 11's Archives Display

long history of helping A.A.s in recovery. Another display item of interest was a 1951 state meetings directory, of which four selected pages listed meetings in lower Fairfield County and Greenwich – including the “third oldest” group, which still meets on Friday evenings (at 8:30 p.m.), as an open meeting with a speaker preceding discussion.

A book of press clippings about John D. Rockefeller’s offer to give a major financial contribution to A.A., plus some other articles about A.A. when it was in its infancy, also attracted interest.

Lin D., Greenwich, Connecticut

The Odyssey of a Big Book

On June 5th, my friend Peggy and I had the pleasure of visiting G.S.O. We came to the 11:00 a.m. A.A. meeting, visited the Archives and were given the tour of the office and met some of the staff. I mentioned to the archivist that I had a Big Book signed by Bill and wanted to donate it to G.S.O.’s Archives if the Archives wanted it. The archivist asked me if it was a Second Edition and I assured her that it was. She then said it would be desirable to put it in the Archives. She also asked me to write a history of the book which I am happy to relate.

My mother, Jo H., joined the Turlock, California group (four men and their wives held meetings in their homes) in August 1951, and in the same year drove to San Francisco to witness Bill receiving the Lasker Award. She is mentioned in the history of A.A. in Oregon as the one woman in a group trying to survive in Burns, Oregon in the 1950s. My mother died in 1993 with 41½ years of sobriety.

I had been working in Saudi Arabia when my mother came into the program and when I returned to California in 1953 I found a miracle had happened and she was happily sober. I went to meetings with her in Turlock. When we moved to Oregon there was no A.A. and she remained sober on her own (with occasional visits from Shorty of TriCities, Washington, a well-known oldtimer).

On Labor Day weekend in 1957, my mother and I drove to the North Bend, Oregon A.A. Conference. I had stopped drinking on June 28, 1957, but was still white-knuckling it. I heard Earl M. speak Saturday and followed this talk by going to a closed women’s A.A. meeting, where I admitted I was an alcoholic. I thought my mother had somehow coached the women at the meeting to tell my story, but when I walked out of that room a feeling overwhelmed me. *I knew that I was free of the obsession to drink* – there was no wind or light, but I knew that I didn’t have to drink any more, and that obsession has never returned. It will soon be 43 years.

I came to the Sunday morning meeting at the Oregon Conference a brand new A.A. member (the day before I had been an Al-Anon) and although I had never won anything before, I won the Big Book and a Twelve and Twelve, which were later mailed to me in Burns. I felt as though I had “a new pair of glasses” after that eventful weekend at North Bend.

Burns, Oregon had no A.A. group at that time, but my mother and I remained sober. In 1958 I moved to Oklahoma City, where I celebrated my first A.A. birthday. The well-known archivist Earl H. of Oklahoma and I attended the same meetings in those days. My husband was sent on a project to Norway in late 1959 and we moved to Tonsberg. The World Directory and the General Service Office were my lifelines. I was able to remain sober with letters to Loners and I found other English-speaking A.A.s.

We lived in California for a year and then went to Whangarei in Northland, New Zealand. There was no A.A. in Whangarei, but with the help of Dr. Davidson (nonalcoholic), I started a group there in 1963 and it is still going strong and has grown immensely.

We left New Zealand for Trinidad and I was contacted in 1964 by G.S.O. for something from New Zealand for the International Convention Souvenir Book. I contributed the photo of the Serenity Prayer in the Maori language. That prayer on a scroll had been given to me by an A.A. from Mt. Eden Prison in Auckland.

I was able to attend the 1965 Toronto Convention representing Trinidad. Before Lois and Bill came to meet the Round the World representatives, I was asked to model the gift for Lois brought by the Columbia A.A.s. Then Bill and Lois came to meet us and that, of course, was an honor and a happy meeting.

From Trinidad we were sent to Ireland and there I met Sackville, “A.A.’s greatest correspondent,” as Bill describes him in *A.A. Comes of Age*. The last of my foreign A.A. experiences was five years spent in Western Australia. While living there I got to know Bunbury Jim, the man who brought A.A. to Western Australia. Then we returned to the U.S. in 1972, which ended my living overseas. The Big Book has traveled with me in my A.A. life until the present. For 42 years it has been with me – a gift from Bill and now it can go back to G.S.O. and remain in the Archives where it will be safe.

Dorothy D., Santa Maria, California

50 Years of A.A. In Central Ohio

In 1999 the Central Ohio Group Fellowship will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary. With this anniversary it seems reasonable that we explore the rich history of Alcoholics Anonymous in Central Ohio.

Alcoholics Anonymous arrived in Columbus, Ohio on November 3, 1941 at 8:00 p.m., thanks to Reverend Floyd Faust. Reverend Faust, who described himself as a country boy from Highland County, Ohio, had never seen a church with more than one room before becoming minister of the Broad Street Christian Church in Columbus. Reverend Faust was only 24 years old when he became minister of the church, and the church board that governed the church had a bad reputation for firing their ministers. Still, Reverend Faust stuck it out. We are so grateful that he did.

Reverend Faust presided over the congregation along

with his wife Dorothy, a minister and social worker. In their profession they had seen the devastating effects of alcoholism. Reverend Faust said that members of his congregation would take the pledge on Sunday and by Saturday they'd be drunk once more.

Help came with Bob Fullerton, a nonalcoholic. Bob was a member of Rev. Faust's church and a CEO for a pharmaceutical firm, and he had come across an article in *The Illinois Medical Record* about Alcoholics Anonymous. The article mentioned ten sources of further information and, in desperation, Reverend Faust wrote to all ten. To his amazement, all ten of them replied. He couldn't believe the dedication of these members of A.A., especially since it was manned by volunteers. They gave a message of hope to Reverend Faust, who had once felt so helpless in the face of this disease.

After several phone calls and letters, Rev. Faust was able to meet with Charles A. of Dayton, Ohio, in August 1941. Charles A. was a salesman who traveled back and forth between Akron and Dayton, and had been one of the alcoholics who had gotten sober in Akron. In the next couple of weeks they decided to hold their first A.A. meeting on November 3, 1941. It was to be held at 8:00 p.m. at 40 West Long Street in the basement. Reverend Faust advertised the meeting on his weekly radio program, which aired five days a week, Monday through Friday, at 7:00 a.m., and was designed to uplift spiritually the Columbus community.

Six people attended that first meeting at the YMCA. Charles A. of Dayton led the meeting. That night they all walked away with some hope for their problems with alcohol. By the time December 1 rolled around, there were 21 members and they moved to the Southern Hotel. They were known as the Columbus Group of A.A.

On February 28, 1942, the group split and 14 members moved to the Odd Fellows Hall on Goodale and started the Central Group, which is still in existence today. The members decided to install a phone and set up an office at the Odd Fellows Hall for Twelfth Step calls. The Central Group

was also responsible for printing one of the first newsletters in the country.

By the end of 1943 there were six groups in Columbus. Between 1944 and 1949 we gained 11 more groups, giving us 17 A.A. meetings in the Central Ohio area. In 1949 Central Ohio had its first interracial group of Alcoholics Anonymous, which was started by Charlie W. In 1949 a committee headed by Bert P. organized the Central Ohio Group Fellowship and with it opened a new office. The by-laws that govern the COGF were approved on July 31, 1949 at Neil House in downtown Columbus. The main architects of the bylaws were Floyd W., Al B. and Harry C. And as always, Reverend Faust was there for spiritual guidance. Since 1949 the Central Ohio Group Fellowship has offered service to the groups and members who need it.

Pat S., Columbus, Ohio

International Directories Wanted

The G.S.O. of Denmark is looking for International Directories from the following years: 1973, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1984 and 1985. If anyone can share these directories (and the sections on Denmark in particular), please send them to the G.S.O. Archives.

Archivist's note: We have been receiving wonderful examples of historic material—area histories, personal remembrances and anecdotes—and have been sharing your contributions through *Markings*.

Please continue to share your experiences and history with us, so we may pass it on.