

How the Big Book Was Developed

Arthur S.

Reference Sources:

AACOA ***AA Comes of Age***, AAWS

AGAA ***The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous***, by Dick B (soft cover)

BW-RT ***Bill W*** by Robert Thompson (soft cover)

BW-FH ***Bill W*** by Francis Hartigan (hard cover)

DBGO ***Dr Bob and the Good Old-timers***, AAWS

GB ***Getting Better Inside Alcoholics Anonymous*** by Nan Robertson (soft cover)

GTBT ***Grateful to Have Been There*** by Nell Wing (soft cover)

LOH ***The Language of the Heart***, AA Grapevine Inc

LR ***Lois Remembers***, by Lois Wilson

NG ***Not God***, by Ernest Kurtz (expanded edition, soft cover)

PIO ***Pass It On***, AAWS

SM ***AA Service Manual and Twelve Concepts for World Service***, AAWS

SW ***Silkworth - the Little Doctor Who Loved Drunks***, by Dale Mitchell (hard cover)

WPR ***Women Pioneers in 12 Step Recovery***, by Charlotte Hunter, Billye Jones and Joan Ziegler (soft cover)

www **Internet Sources** (e.g. Google, Microsoft Encarta, US National Archives & Records Administration NARA)

1937

Nov, Bill W and Dr Bob met in Akron and compared notes. 40 cases were sober (more than 20 for over a year). All once diagnosed as hopeless. In a meeting at T Henry Williams' home, Bill's ideas, for a book, hospitals and how to expand the movement with paid missionaries, narrowly passed by 2 votes among 18 members. The NY group was more enthusiastic. (AACOA vii, 76-77, 144-146, BW-RT 239-243, DBGO 123-124, NG 56-57, PIO 180, LOH 142)

1938

May 20, (PIO 193 and AACOA 153 say Mar/Apr) beginning of the writing of the Big Book at Hank P's office (Honors Dealers, 17 William St in Newark, NJ). Bill W wrote, edited and rewrote manuscripts at home on legal pads then dictated chapters to Ruth Hock (nicknamed "Dutch" - short for "Duchess"). Most of the early hand-written Big Book manuscript documents were lost during a later move from Newark to NYC. (AACOA vii, 159, BW-RT 248-250, LR 197, BW-FH 115, PIO 193, 235, GB 55, LOH 106-107, WPR 79)

Jun, Bill W wrote to Dr Bob "By the way, you might all be thinking up a good title. Nearly everyone agrees that we should sign the volume *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Titles such as *Haven*, *One Hundred Men*, *Comes the Dawn*, etc. have been suggested." (NG 74-75, 333)

Jun 15, Lois' recollection of the first use of the term *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (LR 197)

Jul 18, Dr Esther L Richards (of Johns Hopkins) stated in a letter that Bill W, at that time, was using the name *Alcoholics Anonymous* both as the working title of the book and as the name of the Fellowship. (PIO 202)

Jul 27, Dr William Duncan Silkworth wrote a letter of support for AA for use in fundraising for the book. The letter was incorporated into the chapter *The Doctor's Opinion*. (SW center-fold photo exhibits, AACOA 168) Dr Esther L Richards of Baltimore had suggested to Bill W to get a "Number one physician" in the alcoholism field to write an introduction. (NG 332)

Sep, Board Trustee Frank Amos arranged a meeting between Bill W and Eugene Exman (Religious Editor of Harper Brothers publishers). Exman offered Bill a \$1,500 advance (\$19,400 today) on the rights to the book. The Alcoholic Foundation Board urged acceptance of the offer. Instead, Hank P and Bill formed Works Publishing Co. and sold stock at \$25 par value (\$325 today). 600 shares were issued: Hank and Bill received 200 shares each, 200 shares were sold to others. Later, 30 shares of preferred stock, at \$100 par value (\$1,300 today) were sold as well. To mollify the board, it was decided that the author's royalty (which would ordinarily be Bill's) could go to the Alcoholic Foundation. (LR 197, BW-FH 116-119, SM S6, PIO 193-195, AACOA 157, 188) Encouraged by Dr Silkworth, Charles Towns loaned Hank and Bill \$2,500 for the book. It was later increased to \$4,000. (\$52,000 today). (PIO 196, SM S7, LOH 176, AACOA 13-14, 153-159)

Oct, Bill W's recollection of the first use of the term *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (AACOA 165, PIO 202)

Dec, the Twelve Steps were written at 182 Clinton St (in about 30 minutes). Much argument (sometimes heated) ensued over their wording. (LOH 200, AACOA vii, 160-163, BW-RT 253, PIO 197-199, GB 55-57, AGAA 260)

1939

Jan, The draft book text and personal stories were completed. (AACOA 164, BW-RT 255)

Jan, 400 multilith copies of the book were distributed for evaluation. Each copy was stamped "Loan Copy" to protect the coming copyright. (AACOA 165, LR 197, NG 74, 319, PIO 200) NY

member Jim B (*Vicious Cycle*) suggested the phrases “*God as we understand Him*” and “*Power greater than ourselves*” be added to the Steps and basic text. Bill W later wrote “Those expressions, as we so well know today, have proved lifesavers for many an alcoholic.” (LOH 201) Note: Jim B later moved to Philadelphia, PA in Feb 1940 and started AA there. He also helped start AA in Baltimore, MD. (AACOA 17, BW-FH 140, GTBT 137, WPR 81)

Feb/Mar (?), The distributed multilith copies were returned, but reader’s comments produced few alterations in the final text. A major change did occur at the suggestion of a Montclair, NJ psychiatrist, Dr Howard, who recommended toning down the use of “musts” and changing them to “we ought” or “we should.” Dr Silkworth and Dr Tiebout offered similar advice. (AACOA 167-168 NG 67-77)

Mar (?), The much changed book manuscript was turned over to Tom Uzzell. He was a friend of Hank P, an editor at *Collier’s* and a member of the NYU faculty. The manuscript was variously estimated as 600 to 1,200 pages (including personal stories). Uzzell reduced it to approximately 400 pages. Most cuts came from the personal stories, which had also been edited by Jim S (*The News Hawk*) a journalist from Akron, OH. (AACOA 164, BW-FH 126, PIO 203)

Mar, (?), Bill W, Hank P, Ruth Hock and Dorothy S (wife of Cleveland pioneer Clarence S) drove to Cornwall, NY and presented a much altered manuscript to the printing plant of Cornwall Press. When the plant manager saw the condition of the manuscript, he almost sent them back to type a clean copy. Hank P persuaded the manager to accept the manuscript on condition that the group would examine and correct galley proofs as they came off the press. The group checked in to a local hotel and spent the next several days proofreading galleys. (AACOA 170-171, WPR 81-82)

Apr, 4,730 copies of the first Ed. of *Alcoholics Anonymous* were published at a selling price of \$3.50 (\$46 today). The printer, Edward Blackwell of Cornwall Press, was told to use the thickest paper in his shop. The large, bulky volume became known as the “Big Book.” The idea was to convince the alcoholic he was getting his money’s worth. (AACOA viii, 170, NG 76, PIO 204-205, GB 59) Ray (*An Artist’s Concept*) designed the “circus color” dust jacket. The book had 8 roman and 400 Arabic numbered pages. *The Doctor’s Opinion* started as page 1 and the basic text ended at page 174. The manuscript story of an Akron member, *Ace Full - Seven - Eleven*, was dropped (reputedly, because he was not too pleased with changes made to the first drafts of the Steps and text). 29 stories were included (10 from the east coast, 18 from the mid-west and 1 from the west coast - which was ghost written by Ruth Hock and later removed from the book) (www)