

The origin of AA in Richmond really begins not with Bill Wilson or Dr. Bob; but with Frank Buchman, the leader of the Oxford Group. This story is intriguing and holds within many miracles just as those that led to the miracle of Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob coming together.

In 1929, Buckman sailed for Europe on his way to S. Africa to begin the Oxford Group movement in that country. Buckman's traveling companion was a young Yale graduate, by the name of McGhee Baxter. Mac was an alcoholic who had already been divorced. In the fall of 1928 he had contacted the Oxford Group in an attempt to straighten out his life. History tells us that Buckman could see great leadership abilities in Mac, while I suspect he saw also the wealth and prestige of Mac's family. Never-the-less, Mac broke out in a drunk several times on board the ship. Buckman never gave up on him.

Their travels carried them to England to Holland and to Germany before they set sail for S. Africa. When they landed in Cape Town Mac was so drunk that he had to be led from the ship. (The Ardundel Castle)

At some of the "House Parties" which were sometime attended by 600-700 people, if Mac was scheduled to be one of the "Leaders", Buckman would assign people to "Keep an Eye on Mac". Still Mac sometimes managed to give them the slip and get drunk.

I haven't heard the rest of the story, but early in the Spring of 1940, one Ted Carlson was in treatment for alcoholism in Rockland State Hospital in New York. Upon his return to Richmond, the N.Y. Headquarters sent him a letter advising him to go see one McGhee Baxter. According to a letter to Bill Wilson from Mac Ted followed instructions and went to see McGhee. Ted and Mac met with a Reverend James W. Kennedy from all Saints Episcopal Church, who had a son who was an alcoholic.

A letter to Bill Wilson from McGhee records the first meeting in Richmond and in VA as being held in McGhee's apartment, at 900 W. Franklin St. this meeting was held on June 5, 1940 and there were 12 members present. This included Ted Carlson. McGhee reportedly left town that summer on vacation and later moved to North Carolina. The group reportedly, quit meeting. When speaking sometime later, Jack White told that the group had no guidelines, they were just going to help each other "not drink" so they met and played poker and didn't drink nothing' but

beer. Summer came and it was too hot to meet so they disbanded for the summer. Jack White was reported as already sober in Richmond but didn't know about these other people.

In late June of 1940, more inquiries were received in New York by Mrs. William H. Ridenour, Mrs. M. L. Hunter, through the Rockefeller's. These were thought to be wives writing off for help for their husbands. One was also received from Joe Trundle of Richmond.

Ted Carlson wrote to Ruth Hock, Bill Wilson's secretary, in Oct. of 1940 and said that he could not do too much for AA at that time due to his business but would be glad to help if they could find a leader. In Sept. of 1941, Jack White, who became known as the Father of AA in Richmond, wrote to our N.Y. Headquarters informing them that they had started a new group. Jack White was reportedly the first AA in Virginia to stay sober and stay with the program. Bill Ames was another in Northern VA. Robert Hobson is mentioned, as well as H. Werk and Curry, who was a Pastor. There was a letter from White, saying he had very good success with Nelson A. Dretzel.

Some years later Ted ended up drunk again and died on the bowery in New York City. By July of 1943 there was record of 5 sober members and 6 months later there were 12 regular members. This group met in members homes. The first ten members were Jack White, Tom Lovern, Jack Davis, Jack Ransom, Tom Walton, Bob Harper, Rolf Brain, Bow Dickinson, Turnel Bethel, and Chuck Cheadle who found his way in to the AA circle in 1943. Tom Lovern drank after 27 years. Jack D. got Batkins interested in AA. Jack got cancer in his voice box and moved to Florida for the weather, he never drank again. Dr. John Bullet got sober but later returned to drinking. Chuck Cheadle and Billy K. came into AA at the same time. Chuck kept continuous sobriety. Tom Walton, an early timer drank after 24 years when he was dying with cancer and the pain became too great to bear. He reportedly wrote several 'sharp' letters to Town's Hospital. Bill Wilson answered it.

The group was registered on January 11, 1944 and the meeting was being held at the William Byrd Hotel at Robinson and Broad Sts.. The meetings were semi-monthly, and weekly a short time later. By April 1944, they had 15 members. They met on Wednesday night at the hotel. Dr. McAllister, a dentist, was remembered for saying that he drank only beer, so he was not an alcoholic. By this

time there were a few servicemen attending the meetings from Camp Perry, where a small group had started. Many meetings were reported to be of more of a social nature. One night a week was designated as poker night. Billy Kidd arrived in 1944. Jack Ranson was Billy's sponsor. Elizabeth Blankenship and Ernest Moran (members of the Alanon Club) carried Billy to the club to become a member but the "Board of Governors" decided not to let him join because they didn't want rif-raf. Ernest M. resigned on account of this incident. Billy is said to remember a woman who couldn't stay sober. Reportedly her old man was a racketeer and she could pitch a bitch. Billy carried her a pint of whiskey and she answered the door naked (55-60) years old. Billy is quoted to say "she was the scariest thing you ever saw." He also noticed she had red hair. Costello was an early timer, he taught Billy's daughter piano. Hugo Robins, part of Robins Real Estate, took Billy with him to a picnic in Washington, D.C. There were 50 or 60 in attendance and all had a good time.

In 1944, Jack White, who was a business man, went down and bought a building at 203 N. Jefferson Street. He charged rent of \$ 1.00 a year and AA moved in upstairs. Another document says he charged \$ 35.00 a month rent. The Ladies Auxiliary in Richmond is believed to have started around 1945. (Now known as Alanon) Richmond takes credit for starting the first Ladies Auxiliary. The ladies (wives) took care of the refreshments.

Around this time the group had grown to 22 members and there were two teams to do 12 step work. Two men on each team were to go see the contact and the two men from the other team were to make sure that the contact got to a meeting. This did not work well as there was always something wrong with one of the two men. In 1945 Julius P. Jones arrived and remained sober for the next 42 years until he died. Billy Kable from Staunton, came to Richmond in the summer of 1945, due to the pressure of his wife to sober up. He returned to Staunton in the fall and began to work on others in the area. He was successful, he stayed sober. Jack White wrote Billy and asked him to contact Rudy Freed in Waynesboro. Billy took Rudy to a meeting in Richmond in Jan of 1946. Rudy had a little research left to do, although he continued to go to meetings and carry others to meetings..

On April 18, 1946 the Richmond Times Dispatch published an article on local AA. The article included "Soft beverages, hard common sense mark meetings of Richmond Alcoholics Anonymous." Bob Harper was responsible for that. Cal

Rider, a radio announcer was also mentioned. Richmond now had 75 members meeting in the Jefferson St. Club. The early timers had to put a sign on the podium at the Jefferson St. Club because one man in particular, Dr. Garrison, always talked too long. Wallace has been mentioned to have come into to the fellowship around this time.

John Phillips became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous on Jan. 18, 1946 John opened Three Acres in Feb of 1947. This came about after much discussion with Jack White, Dr. John Bullard, Dr. Silkworth,, and Bill Wilson. Advice from Bill included; that this was a very dangerous occupation for an alcoholic and a lay person to go into. He suggested that an MD> direct it. It was also recommended by Dr. Silkworth and Dr. Bullard that they treat male patients only that female patients had deep seated problems that didn't exist in male patients. Dr. H. M. Richardson of Richmond agreed to become the medical director. The facility was operated for 21 years and was closed in March of 1967.

Dr. Bullet's friend, Tom Burrell, an AA Trustee, from New York came to Richmond and spoke. Dr. Silkworth, the doctor at Towns Hospital, started a group in the hospital over at Nickerbocker. Tom Lovern talks of him and other AA's hauling the drunks to NY to sober them up. Rolf Brain and Bob Harper worked with a guy named Frank Wise, who they tried to carry to NY for help and they created so much disturbance that the plane landed in Baltimore and put all three of them off. Johnny Gardner and a Richmond dentist, Dr. McNalley drank again. Tom W. was a deacon and he was asked to pray at each meeting with a benediction.

Many alcoholics from other parts of the state traveled to Richmond to get dried out in a local detox and went back to their homes to join AA. Rudy Freed came from Waynesboro to dry out. He is still sober with 48 years and belongs to my home group. My father happened to be another one of them. I can still remember my mother telling me of how she gathered up the money to take my dad to Richmond to get him straightened out. In 1948, my father was sober and speaking in Staunton. Many of you know Ruth Dickens of Lynchburg, she was at that meeting and heard my dad talk of his 3 day old baby daughter. I was an A.A. sobriety baby. I'm sure I was not planned. I went to AA meetings for the next 13 years with my parents until my father died. He died sober. I thank God and you of AA who showed my father a sober way of life. I never saw my father drunk thanks to you. Those years

I had with him were filled with many happy memories of going around and picking up other alcoholics and their families and taking them to meetings in the Staunton and Waynesboro area. I went in the back room with the Ladies. I knew I always like being out with the drunks better, but it took me 17 years of drinking to find out it was because I belonged there.

In 1949, Bill Wilson spoke in Richmond , at the Southeastern Convention.

First Delegate Areas were set up in 1951 with Virginia being in the odd Panel. Others members that were mentioned by Tom Lovern, John Phillips and Lloyd Fowler were Mr. Scott, the black undertaker (called probably the cream of black society), Binga, (Emerson Gilmore of Salem is quoted as saying, "when he went in to AA his black friends told him he was crazy, that's a white man's disease, you couldn't be an alcoholic." Lloyd replied, "It didn't make a bit of difference to me, you know." Tom said, "If a black man had a drink I'd just as soon sit down with him." Tom went on to talk about drinking at Kenny's kitchen on Midlothian turnpike. He talks of drinking with the cook, a black man named Harry.

By 1953 the Jefferson Street Club had become too small and AA moved to 210 N. Madison Street. This was one block away from the Jefferson St. Club. Sarge Eweing had moved to Richmond from California and was a member of the local AA by 1953. He says, "he remembers all these AA's with furniture on their backs moving down he alley like a bunch of vagabonds." Many others who were active in early Richmond AA included; Bat. B., John B., Bumpsy F., Alan L., John P., Jack R., Frank W., and Tom W.

Some of the rules used:

You could not just decide to come to AA. One or two members had to visit you at home and if they decided you needed it - they could bring you to a meeting.

You could call AA but you could not just walk in.

Bill Wilson spoke in Richmond at the South Eastern Convention in 1949. Ernest Moran, Frank Watts and Jack White went to Memphis and with politics brought the Convention to Richmond. It was so successful. John P. says he was a member of the Alanon Club and they were running free buses up there from the hotel lobby. He says we made enough money to pay rent for a year.

The first woman to stay sober in Richmond was Mattie Hart. She was secretary of the Alcoholics Anonymous Group, 214 N. Adams St. That was Jack's office. Some other early women were Mary Taylor, Louise Massie, Marian K. Beale,

You may enjoy several different memories reported on the "club and slot machine". One accounts Lowell Parsons, as liking to go to the club and play the slot machine but he got drunk and they refused to let him in. He walked around to the precinct and told the police, "You ought to go and raid that place, because they got a slot machine up there. The police came and sure enough the slot machine was there.

The next version; Dot Mason came to the club and told them if they ever let Ed play in that poker game again when he had his state check and come away broke, she would see to it that something was done. She went to the police.

Another account: Warren Merchant and several members went and told the police, but the raid was brought on by a bigger gun than that. Ed Mason's father was head of the Episcopal Church. When he called them they had to do something about it. Leo C. was running a bar and bookie shop next to Dan's Barber shop. There was a woman involved and Leo was put in the State Farm. This little woman meant business. When the police raided the club the picture came out in the newspaper. It said local AA Club.

Historically, 1966 was the first year for which we seem to have any real documentation of the number and names of districts in VA. There were 8 districts which included: Norfolk, Northern Neck, Fredericksburg, Northern Va., Hampton, Salem, Richmond, and Staunton. Over the years some districts changed names. By 1972, there were 12 districts, and in 1973 there were 13. That was the year Northern Va split into Alexandria and Arlington. By 1976, we added Mt. Vernon and Springfield., and Tidewater had split into three districts. Salem had become Roanoke, and Hampton became Newport News, then Peninsula. By 1977, we had 20 districts.

Splits continued over the next several years. Discussions were held about redistricting. Feathers were ruffled. One June morning in 1980, the Area chairperson announced an appointment of a committee to study the problem of redistricting in Va. Hostility engendered. The wounds healed, and the additions of districts slowed down. By 1981, Petersburg had split from Richmond to become

their own district. Only two new districts were added from 1981 to 1986. Petersburg renamed itself the Southside District. The first Super Saturday was held in 1983. In December of that same year the LCM system was discussed and a committee was set up to handle the growth of the Richmond groups. Richmond was growing by leaps and bounds, groups totaled over 100 in number. From 1987 to 1990 Richmond averaged 19 GSR's attending assemblies representing well over 100 groups. On Sept 8, 1988 South of the James District held it's organizational meeting and was a new District. Joe Sullivan was our Area Chairman from 1989-1990. and was our Area Delegate from 1991-1992. Susan Campbell was our State Chairman from 1991-1992 and was our Area delegate from 1993-1994. By 1991, we had expanded to 34 districts and by 1996 our districts total 38, although one district had reunited leaving the total at 37. The latest split in the Richmond area is called the N.E. Richmond District.

Records indicate over the years that Richmond and Tidewater have been viewed as "running the show," due to their size. Richmond had continued in the forefront in AA in Virginia. There has always been an eagerness and willingness to host many conventions, Southeastern Conventions, Assemblies and Area meetings.

Thank you Richmond for our beginnings, your continued willingness to carry the message to any alcoholic who reaches out for help and for being an excellent example of being part of AA as a whole.

AA's Early Beginnings in Richmond, Fredericksburg, to Lynchburg, Danville & South East- Joe Sullivan

AA 's Early Beginnings in the Central, Northern and Western Parts of VA - Mary Ann 1940's

- By 1940 Bill Ames had gotten sober and become known as "the Father of AA in N. VA.
- By 1941 Marge Fisher was sober and helped start the 1st group in N. VA - (North Arlington Gp)
- By May of 1944 Bill S. had moved from Charleston, W. VA to Roanoke & brought AA w/him Although it took until **March of '46** to hold their 1st meeting.
- In **summer of 1945** under the pressure of his wife, Billy Kable went to Richmond to sober up. He returned to Staunton in the fall and began to work on others in the area. Jack White from Richmond wrote Billy and asked him to contact Rudy Freed in Waynesboro.
- By **Oct 1, 1945** the Waynesboro-Staunton Group had been registered with GSO. The group originally met in Waynesboro in Freed's Garage and then moved to 18 W. Beverly St., Staunton
- In **Jan of 1946** Billy took Rudy to his first meeting in Richmond in Jan of . Rudy still had some research to do, although, he continued going to meetings and taking others along.
- By 1946 there were two large open meetings held in Staunton & Charlottesville. Rudy & Billy had met Scott MacGregor & Sam from Charlottesville, who sobered up in Washington, DC.
- By **May 15, 1946** the Pulaski Group had formed and was a registered group.
- By **Dec 5, 1946** Fredericksburg also had a registered group.
- By **Feb 14, 1947** a new group had been registered in Martinsville..
- By **June 25, 1947** the Clover Group in Warrenton was up and running. It's early members were
- By **Aug 14, 1947** the Winchester Frederick County Group had been started.
- By **Aug 18, 1947** Front Royal had their first group.
- By **Nov 25, 1947** the Vienna Group had been established.
- By **Feb. 23, 1948** the Culpeper Friday Night Group had also registered.

Many AA's traveled to Richmond to get dried out in a local detox. My dad was one of them. I still remember my mother telling me how she had to come up with the money to dry him out and what a hardship that was.

By **April of 1948** Ruth Dickerson had joined AA in Lynchburg. Many AA's would pile into cars and travel to neighboring groups. She was attending the Waynesboro-Staunton and heard my dad talk about his 3 day old baby daughter when telling his story. The 1st 13 yrs of my life was filled with going to AA meetings, visiting newly sober members and taking them to meetings. We would have picnics over on Hul and Mabel's Apperson's land in Nelson County by the creek. We had dances and many other events and many families were there together. We also held AA events at Greenwood.

- By **Aug. 2, 1948** Winchester had a second registered group - the Boyce Clark County Group.
- On **Oct. 26, 1948** Luray had it's 1st registered group.
- By **July 29, 1949** Harrisonburg had formed it's 1st group. They met at the Harrisonburg Creamery.

By 1944 they listed 45 members Margaret Hughes was Sec

*April '42
longer member
C. Miller*

*Aug 44
Hobby Springs
had 2 members
EC Brown
was the contact*

By Aug of '46 there were 36 members in Alex. Harotky Johnson was sec. Bristol VA In had 17 mem. McO. W. J. Jilly was sec. Charlottesville contact

was Paul Kirby Henney Radford had 16 members Sec was WR Cassel had 2 groups eg 9 mem John O. Jooney was sec.

By Feb of 47 to 45 members Marguerite Highland was sec. Charlottesville had 17 members Radford had 16 members M.A. was sec. By Feb of 1948 Alexander had 82 members Francis Radford was Sec.