



The Eighty - Three

Volume 20, Page 3

Area 83 Archives Newsletter

October 2023

HISTORY OF AA IN ONTARIO

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Of Special Interest

Contributions to "The 83" to Archivist@Area83aa.org

May 6 th , 1979 I came into AA. My very first group was Open Doors on Alta Vista Drive in Ottawa. About a year and a half into sobriety I was attending business meetings, I was interested in seeing what went on and liked being a part of. Because of being there, around election time they asked me if I would let my name stand for GSR for Alta Vista Open Door. I then became the GSR. This was about 1980.

We were blessed in those years with some extremely active people. Bob E. was a Past Delegate, an icon for service work in the Ottawa area. He and I became very close friends, he would often put on a school for GSR's for people here in the city, so I got to know him extremely well. The easiest way to say it is he saw things in me that I didn't even see. He became my guru for most things that took place then in my service work. He was hugely instrumental in my getting into service and staying in service.

In addition to Bob there were so many people that stayed active in service, they were "go to" people for us all back in those years. We were blessed with lots of Past Delegates. There was nothing persuading that made me want to leave service. I would let my name stand and it was up to the Area Committee or the governing body as to how often I was there as an active member in service work.

When we get into these jobs, we are often told there is nothing to it anybody can do it. I feel this is wrong and the most misguided piece of information we could

give anybody. We must sit down with people and take the time to sit with them, explain to them rules and regulations that are a part of the service manual and have it with them when they do it. The thought that anyone can do it is very true, but" there's nothing to it" is as far from the truth as you can possibly get. You must work with people that have come before you.

Pocket service manual was the golden book. Bob E was big for that. He would take a bunch of us up to his office on a Saturday and put on a service information day for all of us "we wet behind the ears" GSR's. The groundwork was given to me by people like Bob E, Tommy H and Denis D who never stopped giving back and were always around. When they finished their cycle, they stayed active, we could always count on them for information and guidance. I think those are some of the reasons our Eastern Ontario Area has been so recognizable in the structure of AA.

While I was Delegate to my knowledge, I was the first one to go into the Kingston Penitentiary and give them a Delegate's report. They were as dedicated to the wellbeing of that group as any of us anywhere in the area. They did have their limitations as far as being confined went but by the standpoint of AA's purpose and staying sober, they were as good as any group in Alcoholics Anonymous that I had the pleasure of visiting. I spent 8 or 9 years every Saturday in the first years of my sobriety carrying the message to the Detention Center here in Ottawa. So, I was familiar going in and it was a big part of my sobriety.

There were many big events that I had the opportunity to participate in. At the 1995 60th World Conference in San Diego I had the opportunity to give a short address to 100's of people from across the world on behalf of Area 83. My wife and I had just purchased a trailer and we drove it to San Diego and stayed in it

while we were there. The mingling and mixing with all the service people was wonderful. As many others did, I got to sit in Bill Wilson's Office chair when the Delegates visited his home outside New York City. I also introduced Dr Bob's son at the World Conference in Toronto. With the dedication and duty of being in service- it's your job to learn these things and to be able to pass it on. But you must talk to the people that have come before. There is nothing like the history that we have available. When you mixed a bunch of us in those years in a room something good is going to happen. Something good is coming out the door of those rooms. Something good is gonna be said at some meeting or some kind of event. The enthusiasm for service in AA, its not easy but it's extremely profitable for your sobriety, for your well-being, for your general day to day living, and for almost every single thing that I have learned in the service structure, I have been able to use. The principles work in day to day living in the outside world as well as living sober. The whole thing is just win win win.

Don S Panel 43 Delegate

What! Be elected Delegate! When I attended my first area assembly in the early 1980's as a new Alternate General Vice Representative, never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I could become a Delegate. Nor did I want to be, I wasn't smart enough. At that early stage in my recovery I still was lacking self-confidence and the understanding of the service structure. I recall sitting at the back of the room at my first assembly and thinking that there was no way you would catch me up at the head table with those nicely dressed, well versed, area officers. I also recall at one assembly the current Eastern Canada Regional Trustee, Marne H. saying that anyone can become a regional. Little did I know, that time would come for me, as well.

Just by raising my hand every time I was asked to stand for a service position I would get one. A few times I even got positions I definitely did not want but as we know, it is not what I want it is what my Higher Power knows I need.

My service journey from the time I was an Alternate General Service Rep to the time I became Delegate was so exciting, a huge learning adventure and such a growing experience. I often hear the saying that being in service keeps me sober. That is not how I look at it because I am sober by the grace of God and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Being active in service keeps me connected.

During my term as Delegate I had the opportunity and honour to travel to towns big and small. Most I had never heard of before. I am grateful to the members who send in their contribution order for me to be reimbursed for my expenses. We put on many kilometers getting to see you. All the members were always so welcoming and did they ever put the spread on when it came time to eat. I always left service days with the thought that A.A. in Area 83 was alive and well with such dedicated members willing to step up.

One of the highlights of my journey was when I was the Panel 63 Alternate Delegate. I received a phone call 2 weeks prior to the 63rd General Service Conference. Our Delegate was unable to attend and of course as Alternate it was my responsibility to attend in his place. At the time, I

had been in the same job for 28 years with 31 years of sobriety. My employer did not even know I was an alcoholic never mind a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. He was shocked and even though he did not understand he gave me his blessings to take a week off to attend the conference.

During my journey I had attended and taken part in some Ontario Delegate Committee meetings where I heard what to expect when attending the conference for the first time. Well, let me tell you, I felt like a fish out of water. I was grateful the conference was held in Rye Brooke, New York where there was not a lot of hustle and bustle for the distraction. I was assigned to the Public Information Committee, which is one of the busy ones. As much as I was given all the information available from our Delegate and as much as I tried to absorb it all I still did not feel prepared. For one thing, I was not a Delegate like the other 90. I was an alternate just like 2 others attending the conference for the first time. At least I did not feel alone there.

During our committee meetings we discussed, voted on and made recommendations. We spend long hours doing so and felt so confident that all our recommendations would be passed by the conference. Not all of them did and some of us newer ones felt dejected and wounded from all the hard work we had done only to have them fail. I did however leave that conference with the knowledge to trust the process, which I still try to do today.

The following year I was elected the Panel 65 Delegate. Even though I had already attended one conference I was so nervous about the election. I did not want to be the first Area 83 Alternate not be elected Delegate. Many a sleepless nights preceded this election assembly. I was elected and as of today, I have the distinct honour of being the first Area 83 Delegate to attend 3 General Service Conferences. What a trip!

I suppose my Higher Power thought that I should have an easier time at the conference I attended as Delegate because I was assigned to the Policy/Admissions Committee. At that time, it was not too busy or stressful and I really enjoyed being a part of the discussions and decisions. I felt so much better the second time around and even better at the 3rd conference I attended. These assignments are made by the Conference Committee and AAWS. We serve where and when asked.

I can't recall any major upsets or triumphs events during my term, as Delegate. All I can remember is how exciting it was to be invited to attend service days, conferences, not to mention district and A.A. meetings. I still have members come up to me today and mention that they met me at such and such a place when I was Delegate. Thank goodness for name tags! I wish I could remember all those names; most faces are recognizable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Area 83 for your love, encouragement and confidence in me to serve you and A.A., as a whole. It is with gratitude and love in return that I send you.

Don't sell yourself short! I always say to newcomers who think they can never do what we have done – yes you can! If I can, so can you! My life has changed in so many ways that I wish the same for those in positions now and for those to follow.

Joyce S. Panel 65 Delegate
Area 83 Eastern Ontario

History of secular AA (agnostics, atheists, freethinkers' groups/ members) in Toronto Canada by Joe C.

A history lovers learn to avoid claiming, "This was the first..." This lesson comes into play in Toronto and Canada's history of AA special composition groups for agnostics and atheists. Beyond Belief Agnostics & Freethinkers AA group, in a second-floor classroom of the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (University of Toronto) Thursday September 24, 2009, was thought to be Canada's first AA group for agnostics and atheists. The group was formed by downtown Toronto members of AA from Midtown, James Bond Group, St. Clements, and Stepping Stones. Within a year, Beyond Belief was meeting Thursdays and Saturdays and at the Universalist Unitarian Congregation at St. Clair and Avenue Road, We Agnostics was formed to meet every Tuesday. At the time of writing there are in-person (and online) secular meetings from Vancouver Island to Dartmouth in English and French.

Beyond Belief was not the first secular group in Canada, as we learned later about a Moncton NB member who travelled to Chicago for work in the 1990s and visited secular meetings there. "... in the 80s and 90s I travelled yearly to Chicago for a week-long fall conference. I found a listing somewhere for the Quad A group [AA for Atheists and Agnostics since 1975] and attended at least one of their meetings on each trip. After several years sober, I started to think my home city of Moncton, New Brunswick, needed a similar meeting. With one other member ... we started a secular group in 1992—the "AA 4AF" group—Alcoholics Anonymous For Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers. The group was registered with GSO February 14."

So Beyond Belief was the first in Toronto? No; Eddy G of archives called me, very excited, to show me a 1996 Greater Toronto Area AA meeting list with a We Agnostics group meeting at Main and Gerrard. It was only in the one printing of the meeting guide, and it remains a mystery who the members were or how long it lasted. The 1990's effort in New Brunswick folded when the founder moved away so the only Beyond Belief claim to notoriety may be that it remains the longest running AA group for atheists and agnostics in Canada, at the time of the writing. People came to attend Beyond Belief from across the country and meetings that spawned from Toronto to Hamilton, North Bay to Ottawa. By 2020 there were 17 meeting nights with secular formats in Ontario and about 30 agnostic/atheist meetings coast-to-coast.

And this 2009 meeting was not the beginning of out loud AA atheism in Canada. At the 2000 World Convention of AA in Minneapolis, Fred C (sober 48 years since 1952) from the Vancouver BC area was one of three non-believers on the We Agnostics panel, part of the quinquennial AA travelling birthday The Hill Group in Toronto's Monday discussion group included the "No-God" room offering a meeting without prayer or God-talk since the early 1980s.

Beyond Belief in Toronto was inspired by a Yahoo Group, AA Freethinkers' an International online group of non-believers from Europe, North America, Australia, and other places. On this message board meeting, I learned about a worldwide meetings of AA humanist, freethinkers, and atheist/agnostic groups posted on the NYC Agnostics AA website.

There were under 40 meetings at the turn of the century and over 800 two decades later. I would travel to New York City, attend a few of these agnostic AA groups and I thought, "Toronto is going to love this." I was half-right about that.

Of note, AA World Services, Area 83 and district 10, home to We Agnostics and Beyond Belief never treated nonbelievers as anything more or less than fellow travelers on the AA bus. And as is AA as conflict, resolution won the day and through mediation between GSO, GTAI and Lawrence K who filed a discrimination complaint with the Human Rights Commission, agnostic bearing equals. Today, secular AA is as every-day as women's, young people's or LGBTQIA+ special composition groups, with the autonomous rights to conduct their meetings as the members see fit.

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In 2017, as directed by group conscience, Amelia C, Beyond Belief's GSR asked District 10 (Area 83) to bring a motion to the Area, directing our delegate Kim S to ask the conference to adopt and adapt the Great Britain AA leaflet, *The "God" Word: Agnostics and Atheists in AA*, making it available in English, Spanish and French. With substantial unanimity, the DCM of district 10 was asked to bring this motion to the Area 83 floor where substantial unanimity supported the motion. Kim S would attend the 68th Annual Meeting of the General Service Conference (2018) where *The "God" Word* became part of conference approved literature.

In 2017 the first SOAAR (Secular Ontario AA Roundup) would be held at the United Steelworkers Hall, Toronto. In 2019 Hamilton hosted at the First Unitarian Church; 2021 was cancelled due to COVID-19 and Kingston hosted in 2023 at The Spire. Toronto hosted the third biennial International Conference of Secular AA, August 24—26th, 2018, at the Toronto Downtown Marriott Eaton Centre Hotel. *AA Grapevine* was keen to supply *One Big Tent: Atheist and Agnostic AA Members Shair Their Experience Strength and Hope* to conference attendees, ahead of the scheduled release. Intergroup was asked to sell copies of the new book. By 2020 from Hamilton to Ottawa there were over twenty secular AA meetings. Online meetings became the trend and Ontario meetings were part of over 100 Zoom meetings a day worldwidewidening gateway.

Introduction:

David N. Recovering Alcoholic, District Archives Chairperson for the Golden Triangle District 66. "I would like to congratulate the Group on their 70th Anniversary" History of the Mississippi Group

The Mississippi Group's was started up on September 21, 1953 and has held meetings in Carleton Place continually up until today's date. It should be noted that the Mississippi Group held their meetings in a number of churches in Carleton Place over the years as follows.

The Mississippi group held their first meeting at the Baptist Church in Carleton Place at the corner of Bridge and Morphy Street on September 21, 1953. After a few years the Group then moved to the Zion Church at the corner of Albert and Becwith Street. At that time there were both AA and AI-Anon meetings at this location. The church was later sold and turned into an apartment building.

The Group then moved into St Mary's Catholic Church on Franklyn Street for a short period of time. Then the Mississippi group moved to the Zion Memorial United Church on Franklyn St.

Original Co-Founders of the Mississippi Group
The (2) gentlemen who originally started up the Mississippi Group in Carleton Place were Frank L and Arnold M. Arnold M. worked as a delivery man and Frank L. was a taxi driver, who ended up his carrier as a Jail Guard in Kingston.

In 1949 Arnold M. from Carleton Place caught a train in Almonte to go to his first AA meeting at the West End Group in Ottawa, which had just started up in that same year 1949. This started Arnold's desire for sobriety and in turn to start up a meeting in Carleton Place.

Some interesting facts about the two co-founders of the Mississippi Group, it was once rumored that these two guys also had carriers as boot - leggers during their drinking carriers.

Most unfortunately both Arnold and Frank had a difficult time staying sober and never stayed sober for more than a year or two.

Prior to starting up the Mississippi Group Originally back in 1950 - 51, Arnold M and Joe P. had started up an AA meeting in the old Almonte High School which did not last. However Arnold M. and Frank L. then got together in 1953 and started up the Mississippi Group in Carleton Place which has been going on ever since.

Old Timers

In closing I would like everyone to think of all the old -timers who carved the path of sobriety for us to follow. I have had the opportunity over the years of my sobriety attending your meetings and/or in the District AA meetings to meet many of your group members past and present. One of your long time members who just celebrated 50 years was around when the Golden Triangle District 66 was formed and he came up with the name the Golden Triangle District in the basement of his house. The Mississippi Group has always played a strong role in our District. I wish I could mention stories about a lot of your old timers but I would hate to miss anyone.

Dave N.

District Archives Chairperson

Little Known Facts about the Area History:

Our First delegate was elected in 1951 at the ORC following Bill W's presentation on the Structure of the Third Legacy.

Adam C was the first delegate chosen from Ontario to attend the General Service Conference in New York.

This was also the beginning of Area 83 (then Ontario) with Adam C as delegate and chairman, Walter M as Treasurer, Georg D as Secretary and 4 Committee Members (District/Area Committee Men). Don N, Morey S, Neil M and Glen J.G.

Adam C spent his first year in Office with the assistance of his committee organizing the province into Areas and Districts. At that time the membership of Ontario felt that Unity, our second legacy was an infringement on the Primary Purpose of carrying the message.

Adam was elected the first Canadian Trustee after his term as Delegate. He was followed as Delegate by Art L who worked tirelessly on behalf of AA, the Area and Group Level to convince the membership that for AA to survive there must be Unity.

Whit H, elected as delegate in 1956, made a presentation for a second area in Ontario (present Area 86) and asked that a second delegate be approved for Ontario.

The Province was later divided into two more areas (Northeast and Northwest. Our total area is 363,200 square miles as compared to Texas which is 263,000 square miles.

The districts were re-configured (Redistricting) from 1975 to 1980. Some districts were willing to redistrict but others resisted mainly because they didn't think the alternate delegate had the right to direct the districts to redistrict (which he apologized for).

From 10 Districts (Areas) we divided into 18, then 22 districts. This happened over a period of five years with some opposition from various areas but the resistance was eventually overcome around 1980.

In 1982 a new numbering scheme was developed by Tom H (Toronto Delegate/Trustee) which applied a two digit numbering system which had to be entered into the GSO computer and was eventually adopted by all of the US and Canada.

Reminder to all DCM's and GSR's please send your upcoming announcements to Archivist@Area83aa.org

Also, we are digitizing speaker tapes into MP3 so send us your old tapes and we will add them to our collecting.

David T

Area Archivist