



# The Eighty - Three

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Area 83 Archives Newsletter

AREA 83 ARCHIVES  
March 2010

## A Founder of the Liftlock Group: George H.

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### Of Special Interest

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<http://area83archivist.blogspot.com/>

When pilot George H. returned from active duty in the Air Force at the conclusion of the Second World War, he brought his young family to Peterborough. With the help of the Veteran's Land Act, essentially a Government Loan for Veterans, he acquired ten acres of land and started a business on Highway #7 a few miles east of Peterborough. The Pines Tea Room was a restaurant associated with a Shell gas station. George H. also built and rented cabins for the growing tourist business. The old white frame home still exists sitting back in the field. But the Shell Gas Station, the Pines Tea Room, and the tourist cabins are all gone. The war was over, and like many returning service men, George H. must have had trouble re-adjusting to civilian life. George had a drinking problem. As his wife, Edith May, said to their young son, Jim H., "The war ruined a lot of good men."

George H. soon found himself in the company of a small group of local men who were trying to do something constructive about their alcoholic problem. Norm G. of Peterborough, and later Jim McC. of Keene, and a few others started to meet in various homes, rooms, and meeting places that were available. They met in George H.'s home, and sometimes in The Pines Restaurant. On the wall behind the counter in the restaurant Jim H. as a youngster vividly remembers seeing his father place some AA slogans on the wall where they permanently stayed. This interesting piece of information has been recently corroborated by Jack B. (a long time member of AA in Peterborough) who remembers as a young person going into The Pines Restaurant with his own father and seeing the slogans on the wall above the counter. Of course neither one of these youngsters had any idea what these slogans meant until much later in his life when they came into the fellowship. "We had a meeting in the car on the way out of town, another meeting when we got to our destination, and another meeting on the way home."

In 1947 when Jim McC. came into the program they sometimes met in the Keene Town Hall.

The first few original AA members went to existing meetings out of town. They drove to meetings along the Lakeshore from Colborne to Toronto. As one old-timer said, "We had a meeting in the car on the way out of town, another meeting when we got to our destination, and another meeting on the way home."

Visitors from other established AA groups in Toronto, Port Hope, and the Lakeshore, came to Peterborough as invited speakers, and they shared with the beginners how to run an AA meeting. Eventually, this early group of AA pioneers in Peterborough formed the first AA group, appropriately named, the Liftlock Group. This new group was duly registered with GSO. George brought newcomers, and still suffering alcoholics into his home, sobered them up, looked after them, and with the aid of the other small dedicated group of AA members, helped find some of them jobs. At least one alcoholic brought his trailer, and parked it in the field behind The Pines Tea Room all summer long. Others helped build cabins and some lived in them. In a moment of fond reminiscence, Jim H. recently laughed and remarked, "Why, we didn't even need a guard dog. Early one morning I went into the Pines Tea Room and a newly recovering alcoholic crawled out from under the counter where he had been sleeping."

George H. was one of the first AA members in Peterborough who got a One Year Medallion in 1948 from the newly formed Lift Lock Group. His son Jim H. still has in his possession his father's One Year Medallion. On special occasions such as an important Group Anniversary Jim H. shows off this important archival treasure with great pride and will talk about his father and the Old Timers who started the Liftlock Group.

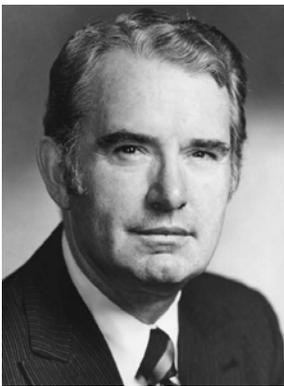
George H. stayed sober for four and one half years and helped many newcomers get a foothold in the program. He had trouble keeping the precious gift of sobriety he once had. Eventually, George H. died alone on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1962. (Jim M., Peterborough)

## Michael Alexander (July 17, 1921-February 16, 2010)

Looking back across the half century and more he has had ties to A.A., Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee emeritus Michael Alexander says, “A.A. doesn’t stand still any more than humanity does. But even as it reflects changes in society as we know it today, substantively A.A. has stayed the same, adhering to the spirit of its Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Since his introduction to A.A. in the 1950s, Mike adds, “the membership has grown from barely 200,000 in 70 countries to nearly 2 million in 180 countries.”

Mike served as a Class A trustee of the General Service Board from 1976-1985, then as trustee chair from 1988- 1993. He is now retired from his position as a senior partner in the New York law firm of Smith, Steibel, Alexander and Saskor—established by A.A.’s nonalcoholic friend and mentor Bernard B. Smith, who died in 1970, six months before the death of A.A. co-founder Bill W. “I joined the firm in 1952 as a young attorney out of Harvard,” Mike remembers. “No one among my family or friends was an alcoholic, and nothing I had absorbed in law school prepared me for my first encounter with A.A., but under the tutelage of Bernard Smith I quickly learned to respect it and its noble mission. A fine attorney, Bernard Smith was absorbed in Fellowship affairs and chaired the board of trustees from 1951 to 1956.

During the next 20 years, spanning the 1950s and ‘60s, Mike came to know Bill and his wife, Lois, “and so many others who helped to shape the service structure of A.A.” He is quick to note, however, that “I did not relate to them as alcoholics. In my capacity as a legal adviser, I saw them as solid, sensible, knowledgeable business people.” Mike remembers that “working with Bill was a rewarding experience, not only because of his extraordinary vision but also because his early training in law provided a common ground for understanding. We forget sometimes that Bill completed the requirements for graduation from Brooklyn Law School in the 1920s—he just never got around to picking up his diploma.” Mike has a special spot in his heart for Lois, who lived until 1988, some 17 years after Bill’s death. “It was my great privilege to be her friend and adviser,” he says. “Like Bill, Lois was a person of great magnitude. In my view, there would have been no A.A. but for her, at least not in the way we know it today.” In his years as a trustee, Mike says, “there was no single activity other than sleep that engaged so much of my time as A.A. Actually I’ve been around A.A. so much and so long, I tend to forget that for me, a nonalcoholic trustee who seldom



drinks alcoholic beverages, it’s okay to drink. Besides, I prefer coffee.” When Mike assumed the responsibilities of trustee chair in spring 1988, three years after rotating out as a trustee, his wife, Claire, was rather surprised, he says. “But then she attended an A.A. Forum with me. She met the people, heard the talks and was deeply impressed by the good will and devotion to A.A. that prevailed. ‘Now I understand why you’re so committed to A.A.,’ she told me.” Contemplating the Fellowship’s history, Mike finds it “astounding to think of the progress we have made and how much stability we have today. I think of us as being in a sailboat on a rough sea in the 1940s, when every gust of wind might have tipped us over; and now we’re something like a large ocean liner that requires special equipment—the group conscience, or Advisory Actions, of the Conference—to help us change direction or make it to safe harbor. This takes effort and time and consensus, and sometimes we fret and fume because we aren’t moving faster. But by the same token, it’s hard to topple us. We’re very stable.”

Today, 14 years after rotating as trustee chair, Mike still goes to open A.A. meetings in Manhattan and on the east end of Long Island, still participates as a nonvoting member in meetings of the board of trustees, and shares his experience, strength and hope with new trustees every summer at the July meeting of the board. “I haven’t left A.A.,” he says with a smile. “It’s a way of life.” In 1993 Mike said “farewell” to the Conference with a grateful heart. “Gratitude draws me into kinship with every man, woman and child who has ever been a member of A.A.,” he said. “Each of them is part of the fabric of fellowship that is the essence of A.A. It is said that a butterfly fluttering its wings in Beijing may, by that action, initiate currents that will ultimately affect the weather of New York. So it is that the word or deed of any A.A. member may, if persuasive or appealing, initiate currents that affect the Fellowship. The process for publishing the Big Book in Swahili, for example, started with a comment made at an A.A. Regional Forum in Maryland. “The reverse is surely true: Without a doubt, A.A. in time shapes the character of those whose lives it touches. I am a different person because of A.A. and, I believe, a better one.... I salute Alcoholics Anonymous for all it does for humanity, and for what it does spiritually for its members and for friends like me.” (Box 459, Vol 53, No. 6, Holiday Issue 2007. pp. 3-4)

## District 78 Madawaska

District 78 encompasses about 1700 square km, with a total AA membership of roughly one hundred. Six or seven years ago the District created an archives chair. Ron C from Maynooth brought the idea to the district table and he went on to serve as the archives chair for a year or two doing a great job. As a retiree, I was persuaded to take over as Archives chairman. To date six groups in the District have recorded interviews with four of their founders. What we have found to be something of a challenge is coming up with a new project each month. We generally like a member to have 20 years before asking him/her for an interview. As Al H. (my archives partner) and I have interviewed 21 of these members to date and we are running out of prospects. Consequently, as of last year, we started recording anniversary meetings of the various groups. Another bit of a challenge is to vary our display for the annual District conference. It takes some thought but so far we've been able to add or change something each fall. If you enjoy talking to old-timers, collecting what artefacts you can, archives is gratifying and rewarding. (Howard L., District 78 Archives Chair)

## GTA Intergroup Archives

Have you ever played that parlour game where a short statement is whispered from one person to another around the room until it finally returns to the originator, who repeats both the original and last versions out loud? It's usually quite amazing.

Over and over again, we hear the recipe for sobriety – 'don't drink, go to meetings, get active, pray if you can'. That's it. No mention of the Twelve Steps, or embedding their Principles in our lives. I suspect that originally this was specific advice for newbies – and in that context makes sense.

This is what archives are for – to capture information and records from our present, and preserve them as they become records of our past. Somewhere there might still be a speaker tape that has the old-time version of 'don't drink, go to meetings.....'. It would be such a scoop to actually find such a tape, and be able to understand what was originally meant.

The Toronto Archives Committee is comprised of the Archives sub-committee chairs from all the Districts in the GTA. We have a chairperson – me, a vice-chair, Bob D. of the Weston Group and an archivist – Máire O. from the Leslie Group. There are also members-at-large who are asked to 'be part of' because of particular skills. Mark C. from the Welcome Group is invaluable in digitizing our reel-to-reel audio tapes. Eddie G. from the Beaches Group and some others are currently stabilizing and cataloging documents and artifacts in our physical collection.

Sound exciting? Right up your alley? Welcome, then. Our major ongoing projects are capturing group histories – where did my home group come from? And oral histories of our long-timers – what was AA like way back then?

The best way to get involved would be to get in touch with your District's Archives chair. That's where the work is being done – at the District and Group level. Of course, if you wish to visit us, the Committee meets the second Sunday of each month at 10 am, in the Intergroup boardroom and we will make you welcome.

Until then, when you hear your Group's secretary say the cupboard is going to be cleaned out and all the old business meeting minutes thrown out to make more room for coffee cups, jump up! Scream – NO! Ask for permission to bring those old, very wanted, very important documents to someone from the Archives committee. We will keep them, care for them and make them accessible for future generations.

On that note and as a follow up to a previous article in this publication on Bob D. and the impressive collection he passed on to this committee, the GTA Archives Committee has decided to open this up to the Fellowship on Sunday October 3, 2010. The location is yet to be determined. Please check the GTA Intergroup website closer to that time for details. (Roy R. Chair, Toronto Intergroup Archives Committee)

### Upcoming Events:

**Toronto**— *East Toronto Archives Breakfast*, May 16, 2010. 9-12. Embers Restaurant, 781 Warden Ave.

*26th Annual Archives Breakfast*. November 7, 2010. 9-12. 1036 Lakeshore Road E., Mississauga. Tickets \$25

**Peterborough**—*5th Annual Area 83 Archives Workshop*, April 10, 2010. 9:45-3:30. Peterborough Intergroup, 625 Cameron Street. [(705) 745-6111]. Guided tour of Peterborough Museum Archives Repository at 2:30.

**The 14th Annual National Archives Workshop**, Macon, Georgia. Sept 23-26, 2010. <http://www.aanationalarchivesworkshop.com>

**Hamilton** *14th Annual Hamilton & District Archives Breakfast*. Sunday April 18, 2010. Carmen's Banquet Centre (1520 Stonechurch Rd East, ). Speaker—Máire O'B. For more information call (905) 662—4096.

## From the Archivist

Being newly appointed to this position of Archivist for Area 83, I am to "...supply advice and consultation when requested to all Archives Committees in the Area with respect to the cataloging and preservation of archival material in accordance with the archives workbook." My Archival experience and training started within District 86 where I served on the Archive committee for five years. I have gained experience in methods for correct storage, cataloging and data base collections. Conducting Oral Histories has been enriching and enhanced my understanding towards the importance of gathering the "Essence of Our History". Learning through experiences with the District and Area I have gained knowledge of our Archives Workbook and earned a better understanding towards the importance of working within our A.A. Traditions.

I had the opportunity of working with Máire O'B., our past Archivist, and was privileged to present with her at the 12th Annual National Archive Workshop in Niagara Falls, New York in 2008. I was pleased to have the experience of being on the hosting committee for the First Annual Area 83 Archives Workshop held at Peterborough in 2006. I am now honored to have the opportunity of serving as your Archivist at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Area 83 workshop which has rotated back to District 86 at the Peterborough Intergroup. I am looking forward to seeing you there. Feeling humbled with the opportunities already extended to me through the Archives I would like to express my gratitude and tell you how honored I am to continue in this journey of our history, one thrill at a time. (Cathy U., Erin Group in District 86, Archivist Area 83)

## From the Chair

Spring's arrival re-energizes me to carry the message of the importance of Archives in Area 83. There is much history to be preserved, a task that can seem overwhelming when taken as a whole. When so confronted, my first urge is to either (1) start with the easiest part so I can feel like I am making some progress, or (2) put it off until later because it's too much to think about right now. Neither of these approaches is very productive.

The key, I've found in taking on other large projects, is to break it down to "one step at a time." (I wonder where I've heard that idea before!) This involves making a plan in advance of plunging into action.

To quote from a proposed amendment to the Archives Workbook (on the agenda at the April 2010 General Service Conference): "However, before you begin building a collection, it is recommended that you write an effective collection policy." The wording goes on to describe a collection policy as answering these questions:

- What do we want to collect?
- How will we collect it?
- How will we store it?
- How will we maintain it?

And there are two more very important questions, which I hadn't thought of until I became Archives Chair:

- What do we *not* want to collect?
- What do we *pass on* if we may already have collected the item?

Whether or not this particular wording is approved to be added to the Archives Workbook, the ideas seem sound to me in guiding archival activity within Area 83.

The topics at the Assembly Archives Workshop and at the Area 83 Archives Workshop address one or more of these topics. One way to learn about a topic is to become chair of that topic's committee. That's how I have been learning about Archives since I became your Archives Committee Chair. I hope to continue to learn and to contribute to our progress in preserving our history. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the members of Area 83. (Milner G., Archives Chair)