

The Eighty - Three 'ORIGINS'

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Area 83 Archives Newsletter
Ottawa Edition

AREA 83 ARCHIVES
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History of AA in Ottawa

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Of Special Interest

From the Archives Chair:

- The 15th Annual Area 83 Archives Workshop will be held in Ottawa ON, Saturday March 30, 2020.
- Included is a free tour of The City of Ottawa's Archives Repository.

Area 83 Archives Chair:
Marty M.
Area 83 Archivist:
Linda McQ.

Contributions to "The Eighty Three" should be sent to:
archivist@area83aa.org

This history is in large part based on a draft prepared in 1991 by Bob E, Jim C and Carolyn A. Bob sobered up on March 7, 1952 at the Mount Dennis Group in Toronto and came to Ottawa in the 1970's. Carolyn's date of sobriety is 1985 and she sobered up in Ottawa as did Jim, in 1987. Their account is largely anecdotal with some access to documentation especially a minute book maintained by Leo B.

In 1945, Father Geoffrey Dowsett had travelled to New York and brought the Twelve Steps to Ottawa. He and his friend Father Cornelius Herlihey were non-alcoholic members of the Oblate order and became lifelong supporters of AA in Ottawa.

The first documented Ottawa contact was made by Jack F with Tom G of the Toronto Group on April 19, 1945. At an August 3, 1945 meeting at the Lord Elgin Hotel, it was decided to form a group in Ottawa.

Tom G of Toronto, Jack F, Clem and Roy G, attended the first formally recorded meeting in Ottawa on Tuesday, October 30, 1945 in room 317 at 165 Sparks Street. They were joined by Bob H at the November 28, 1945 meeting. The minutes note that Tom G of Toronto "gave an inspiring address and introduced the custom of closing the meeting with the Lord's Prayer".

A group called the Ottawa Group started in the fall of 1945 with three members and by May 30, 1946 membership had increased to 47. At a March 5, 1946 meeting at Jack's home at 68 Cameron Avenue, it was decided to hold meetings on Tuesdays and Fridays. This was the beginning of the Tuesday Friday Group which is the oldest continuing Group in Ottawa.

In January 1946, the following advertisement was approved to run for three days in the personal column of the Ottawa Citizen:

"Liquor may interfere with a normal mode of living. Write Alcoholics Anonymous, Ottawa Club, P.O. Box 38"

After the publication of the Reader's Digest article in January 1946, Mr. Hurlow of the Ottawa Citizen wrote the first newspaper article about AA in Ottawa. The March 29, 1946 meeting welcomed the first two women as Ottawa AA members.

Leo B from Montreal, a New Brunswick born Mountie, who had returned from the Armed Forces, joined the Tuesday Friday Group on April 5, 1946 and became president of the Group on January 14, 1947. Leo went on to form the West End Group in October 1947, which still exists today

The April 22, 1947 minutes indicate that "Chairman Leo B opened the meeting promptly at 8:30 pm and closed the meeting at 9:30 pm so that members would have 30 minutes for a general chat and get together".

The first open meeting was held on May 13, 1947 at the RCMP band room with one hundred people in attendance.

On April 1948, the Uptown Group was formed and continues to meet on Monday nights. Early members included Jack F of 68 Cameron Avenue, Roy G who sobered up in 1948 and whose wife Lillian answered the AA phones from her home for 12 years, and Ken M from Brockville who sponsored Cletus H whose art is on display at Ottawa AA Archives. Three early members of the Uptown Group were women - Ruby S, Kay H and Edna C. It was Edna C who sponsored Charlie S in May 1952.

The first Eastern Ontario Conference was held in November 1952. Charlie S, (date of sobriety May 14, 1952), lovingly known as Big Charlie - big of stature and big of heart - recounts that the first Fall Conference was held in three locations - The Chateau Laurier Hotel, St. Patrick's Church Hall and the Orange Hall. Why three locations? No one would have AA meetings for three days running so they had to meet in three different locations.

Over the years Ottawa delegates to the General Service Conference included Alf McG - 1965-66, Charlie P - 1973-74, Wilf O'G - 1979-80, Bob E - 1985-86, and Don S - 1992-93. This information was supplied by Tina M (date of sobriety September 7, 1968) who was the delegate for Northeastern Ontario in 1979-80.

Dan McD,

Archivist Ottawa AA Archives June 16, 2004

**Update: since Dan wrote this article, Ottawa has had another delegate to the General Service Conference - Sandy S - 2009-10.

FROM THE VAULTS

How the Chips Came to Ottawa

AA in Ottawa hasn't always had the chip system to use as one of its many tools. Ghislaine L., a dedicated and enthusiastic member of AA with more than forty-four years of sobriety, remembers how the chips came to Ottawa.

"I was born and lived in Ottawa all my life, and in 1974 I decided to transfer to Montreal to work for the same firm I was with in Ottawa. I used this transfer as an excuse to leave all my drinking friends behind. I was indeed very sick when I made that decision."

"I spent fourteen months living in Montreal. It was the worst part of my life because I drank the most, I got sick the most, I was hospitalized three times and I eventually I left my job. I lived in total despair. I attended a few AA meetings but was still drinking. Eventually I had a moment - June 22nd, 1975 - when I was sitting on the floor of my apartment, crying, and I thought 'I need help'. It was also at that very moment that I felt something like a miracle or a spiritual awakening, and I was led to empty the contents of my bottles and stopped taking my pills. A day and a half later, I was very ill and used the last of my money to take a taxi to the Montreal Intergroup office where I met a little woman named Terry (also called "Terry the terror") who was answering the phones that day. She gave me her phone number and told me to call her any time, day or night, as long as I was sober. I did contact her and through Terry I was hospitalized due to the DTs and convulsions. Terry then took me to Maple Leaf Farm in Vermont (a detox/recovery program) where I remained for three weeks. I then returned to Montreal to stay a few weeks, before returning to

Ottawa. That was the best part of my life because it was the beginning of my journey to sobriety."

"Terry had taken me to a meeting in Montreal and had given me a desire chip. In Montreal at that time, the sponsor gave the chips to his or her sponsee and you received a medallion after two years rather than one."

"In Ottawa, I joined the Centennial Group, which became my home group for about 15 years. There was no chip system in Ottawa at that time but when I had been sober for three months, Terry called and told me to come back to Montreal so she could give me my three-month chip."

"As the months went on, Terry would call and I would go to Montreal, bring my chips back to Ottawa and show them to my sponsor and some other members of the Centennial group. They were so impressed with this chip system that they decided to adopt it for our group. It took no time to set it up. Someone came in one Saturday with poker chips and the rest was history. Later I joined Young Circle which included some young members who moved from Montreal and brought their chips with them. And they went to other meetings and I went to other meetings and that's basically how the chips came to Ottawa."

"I was very grateful I was able to do that because the chips were so important to me. They kept me alive and they motivated me not to drink. That was the first thing that those chips did for me - they gave me hope. I remember that Terry looked at me very intently when she gave me that first chip and told me I would make it - she gave me hope."

One District Becomes Three

1977 - 1980 History

The first recorded Minutes from the Old Ottawa District in the Ottawa AA Archives Repository is December 1976. The District's name was the Ottawa District General Service Committee.

The first mention of the possibility of the District splitting is in the August 21, 1977 Minutes. There was quite a bit of discussion, and it was decided to hold a vote at the November 1977 meeting after Groups were consulted. It was actually not discussed until the December 1977 meeting. A motion was made for "All in favour of dividing the Ottawa District" which a show of hands indicated that those in attendance were unanimously against the split. A question was asked "is this problem now finished? Yes or No? Leo M, the District Committee Member (DCM), answered "yes, it is finished". In the January 15, 1978 Minutes of the East Ontario Area Committee, it was written "the Big Bug-A-Boo" is Ottawa, where they have upwards of sixty Groups, and at their District Meeting in December 1977, voted down the division of that District.

This subject was long from finished. It was brought up time and time again from 1977 until February 17, 1980, when under Old Business, Jack T DCM, presented a suggested agenda for a Re-Districting Committee to be completed by mid-

September 1980. The Committee was formed with many directions on how to have Groups participate in the process.

On June 15, 1980 a meeting was held to hold elections for the new Districts. Out of 71 letters sent out to Groups to re-district or not, 53 Groups responded affirmatively to the proposal. Only 2-3 Groups were opposed or concerned regarding the proposal.

The following new Districts were formed along with DCM's, Alternate DCM's: Area Q: DCM - Stu M; Name - Ottawa Bytown;

Area S: DCM - Ron H; Area T: DCM - Ron B, Alternate DCM - Stan C; Area R: DCM Bev K, Alternate DCM - Ozzie L

At the September 20, 1981 Eastern Ontario Area Committee meeting, the Alternate Delegate, Tommy H, gave a presentation on Assigning of District Identifiers to Group Numbers. Up until now, the Eastern Ontario Area Committee used areas to define where Districts were located. Tommy was then asked to propose a numbering system for Districts, which he did. A motion was made that "The District Numbering System herewith presented be adopted" was made and carried. From this point on, the following Areas were now numbered to:

Area Q: District 58; Area S: District 62; Area T: District 48; Area R: District 54



The Freedom Group's roots originated as the "Royal Ottawa Hospital Group" in 1973 when it was originally conceived and funded by The Royal Ottawa Hospital.

The group became "self-supporting" in February 10, 1977 when it registered with the General Service Office as an AA Group with 15 members. The name was changed to "The Royal Ottawa Group" and the format altered to an open speaker meeting. The founding members were Mike M., Dave B. and Joanne M. In 1982 the name was changed

Freedom Group
Founded February 10, 1977

again to "The Freedom Group". Meetings were held on Tuesdays at 8:00 pm in The Patients Centre at The Royal Ottawa Hospital from 1973 to 1983. In September 1983, the meeting location was changed to Kitchissippi (formerly Kingsway) United Church where it remains today.

By the mid 1980's attendance grew into one of Ottawa's largest mixed meetings running consistently with 100 - 150 people in attendance with Group membership of approximately 20 to 30 active members. By the late 1990's, attendance dropped off dramatically and there was concern the meeting might fold. However, attendance began to increase to where it is today at around 50-85 people and can exceed to more than 100 for celebrations. It is very rare that we don't have at least two birthday celebrations every month. Membership demographic is about 40% over 40 years of age with a mix of males to females about 60/40. Members are very active in all aspects of AA Service with sobriety ranging from less than a year to over 25 years.

Hope in Recovery Group
Founded in 1995



The Hope in Recovery Group was started in 1995 by Rita H., who liked the idea of having breakfast before the meeting.

Our first meeting place was at the Big Wheel Café on Highway 31. The meeting has known several homes since then: Billings Bridge; Canadian Legion; The Ridgeway; Bella Vista, The RA Centre. Our home today is the Hometown Grill on Bank Street, near Heron Rd.

The Hometown Grill has been our meeting place for the last 5 years. We meet in a private room called "The Penalty Box". Our meeting averages about 20 members a week who enjoy breakfast together followed by a closed discussion meeting.



Eastern Canada Regional Forum

Delta House Hotel Ottawa, Ontario November 13-15, 2020

Ever attend a Regional Forum? If you are interested, we welcome and encourage First Time Forum attendees! These Forums provide a unique opportunity for A.A. members and local trusted servants throughout the U.S. and Canada to exchange information and share experience with representatives of the General Service Board, A.A.W.S., A.A. Grapevine, and the General Service Office. **There is NO registration FEE. . . Hope to see you there!**

For details go to www.aa.org



Ottawa ✦ 2020 ✦ Area 83

Is There A Stigma Associated with The Word "Archive" - /'är kīv/?

Submitted by Juliet H., Ottawa AA Archives Committee



The Oxford Dictionary defines Archives as: "a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people".

Does thinking about *archives* give you hives? Do you immediately start sneezing at the mere thought of dusty books and files? Is the word "archives", like alcoholism, stigmatized?

Perhaps because my Granny influenced a passion for books, "You can learn anything if you can read"; or quite possibly because it was a sad little group (and I have always had a soft spot for the underdog), or maybe for a chance to work with Sue B., or more likely because I love our program, I recently joined the Ottawa Archives Committee. Giving back to the program via service commitments is strongly encouraged, but surely there are other "sexier" positions. How can we bring

the sexy back to Archives? How can we make reading through books and filing papers fun? How can we highlight the creativity needed for displays? How do we bring to mind that Archives is more than just history, but in fact, our legacy? Isn't archiving actually a form of caring and protecting our treasured memories of past members, groups, anecdotes and AA charm? An opportunity to capturing hope and gratitude through showing ways AA has impacted the community and transformed families' lives? Certainly we have a lot to learn from our past - why certain groups folded for instance, and how we can contribute to effectively sustain AA for the future. Do you enjoy a good mystery? Are you naturally curious? Do you find yourself asking, "Why?" Why not come and join us in mining for AA gold or at least a few gems. You might be surprised at what you find.

If you have an idea on how to change the stigma associated with the word "Archives" - we invite you to share your ideas on attraction rather than promotion! Email us at archives@ottawaaa.org. We will let you know the outcome in the next printing of the Area 83 Archives Newsletter!

History of the Ottawa Alkathon

The Alkathon was started by two members (Toby C. and Jack W.) during the late '60s. At the time, they invited the destitute and homeless alcoholics to a Christmas Dinner held on Christmas Eve at St. Giles Church; corner of Bank St. & First Ave. It was an unparalleled gesture to serve a first-class dinner to the street people of Ottawa afflicted with Alcoholism. It was a two-hour affair followed by an A.A. meeting. Some of these hardened street people didn't show, as they did not want to pay the price - attending an A.A. meeting. It was nonetheless successful and repeated the following year with an increased attendance. This Christmas Dinner on Christmas Eve had grown and grown to what has become known as the Alkathon today.

After that it went to a stand-alone Committee comprised of members from local Groups with the focus being placed on AA meetings and fellowship; the food was secondary. New Years Eve was also now included. This lasted for a few years; however, the Alkathon Committees started having the event catered which was quite expensive.

In the late 1980's, early 1990's, the Alternate District Committee Members (Alt/DCM's) from Districts 48, 54, 58, 62 & 66 became responsible for the Alkathon Committee due to the fact that they have committee experience. The Alt/DCM's brought information back to their District's regarding the happenings of the Alkathon Committee and how it was coming along. Contributions came from Districts and Groups and any surpluses were disbursed back to Districts.

For quite a number of years now, the Alkathon has returned to a stand-alone committee and has been that way ever since. Traditionally, Districts 54, 58 and 62 (Districts 48 and 66 now have their own event) and Intergroup in Ottawa provide "seed money" to get the Alkathon off the ground. Again, traditionally, the Alkathon Committee would return the seed money and any surpluses back to the Districts and Intergroup

if it was available. More times than not, the Ottawa Fellowship has been extremely good to its Alkathon and the seed money, plus surplus, has been returned. Liaisons from each of the three Districts are asked to attend Alkathon Committee meetings to bring the information back to their Districts. Many of these Liaisons also become active members on the Alkathon Committee helping out where needed!

In 2014, the Alkathon held a group inventory which was facilitated by a District Committee Member (DCM) to take a look at how they were doing and if they were adequately serving the fellowship and carrying the AA message. Out of that inventory, it was realized that the focus needed to be placed back on the AA meetings and fellowship; the food was secondary. A mission statement was then developed which reads: "The Basic purpose of the Alkathon is to provide a safe and sober environment for the new and still suffering alcoholic over Christmas and New Year."

In 2018, the Alkathon held another group inventory which was facilitated by another DCM. A few weeks later the Alkathon Committee met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Intergroup and there was a proposal to take the Alkathon under the umbrella of Intergroup. The joint meeting was quite lengthy and there was ample discussion and a vote was taken whether to remain a stand-alone committee or not. Results were twenty in favour for remaining as a stand-alone committee, with 1 abstention. To this day, the Ottawa Alkathon still thrives. This is Ottawa's Alkathon and the fellowship takes good care of it. The main goal of the Alkathon has always been for the alcoholic who is suffering. This is not always the new comer. Christmas and New Years can be a very difficult time of year for many and the Alkathon provides hope, love and acceptance to all.