

The Book That Started It All

The Original Working Manuscript of *Alcoholics Anonymous*

With essays and notes by leading AA historians

“Amid the wealth of literature on Alcoholics Anonymous, you have in your hands the greatest treasure of all, the beginning of it all, the charter of the Fellowship. Fine Books and Collections ranks [the purchase of the Big Book manuscript] among the top ten of 2007, along with the Magna Carta, and comparing the working manuscript of the Big Book to the ‘Great Charter’ of our constitutional liberty is not all that far-fetched. Both great works offer us freedom from oppression, and both have—in different ways—changed the world for the better. But finally, the value of this book is measured by the people it touches. As many AA members would say, ‘What’s a book worth that saves your life?’ ”

—From the introductory essay, “The Big Book Revealed”

Alcoholics Anonymous, commonly known as the Big Book, is the publication that forever changed the way the world treats alcoholics and addiction. Written by AA’s cofounder, Bill Wilson, with contributions from a handful of the original one hundred AA members, the Big Book has been revered and studied as the “textbook” of the program by millions worldwide since its publication in 1939.

The original working manuscript, from which the printer’s proof was created, shows handwritten changes made in black, green, and red pencil on page after page, revealing the opinions, debates, and discussions that went into making the Big Book. For nearly forty years, this primary document lay within the confines of Bill and Lois Wilson’s home in Bedford Hills, New York. In 1978, Lois gifted her most prized possession to a friend, and the document stayed hidden from public view for nearly thirty years more until it was eventually purchased by its current owner, whose goal is to share it with the world.

(Continued on back flap)

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The Original Working Manuscript
of Alcoholics Anonymous

HAZELDEN®

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Editor's note

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This book was printed on acid-free paper.

Production note

The original working manuscript of *Alcoholics Anonymous* has been captured with state-of-the-art technology, utilizing a Sinar AG large format camera back, and saved as tiff images at 300 dpi resolution. For preservation of the manuscript, each page was treated with an alkaline material to aid in preventing deterioration of the paper. The pages were then placed inside separate sleeves made of polyester film. Finally, the sleeves were encapsulated, in which all air was pressed out of them, making each sleeve perfectly flat.

The annotations that appear throughout the manuscript have been conserved in their original state without artificial means to wash away imperfections in the inks. However, the inks were found to be water-sensitive and not conducive to treatment for purposes of maximum preservation. The color of the pages vary slightly due to the natural aging of the paper used to compose the document, among other possible factors. To further preserve the integrity of the pages, no color enhancement was attempted in preparing this manuscript for printing. Consequently, the result is a remarkable visual display that achieves our primary intention: to as closely as possible give readers the experience of viewing the actual document.



*In homage to my grandmother, who often cited the famous line
from the Sermon on the Mount, “Don’t hide your light under a bushel,”
I, the current owner of the manuscript, happily, proudly, and humbly
make this original working manuscript edition of the Big Book
accessible to the public for the first time.*

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P R E F A C E

Presented herein, printed from a high-definition scan, is the original working manuscript of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, known to people in Twelve Step programs worldwide as “the Big Book.” We are grateful to the owner of the manuscript for allowing Hazelden to make this seminal work available to readers for the first time.

Following this preface you will find two essays that introduce and illuminate the manuscript from two different but complementary perspectives. The first essay, “Historical Context and Suggested Framework for Reading the Working Manuscript,” was written by a Big Book historian commissioned by the publisher. The second essay, “The Big Book Revealed,” was written by a group of AA historians commissioned by the owner of the manuscript. They described the writing of their essay as follows:

This essay represents the wisdom and perspectives of many different AA historians and enthusiasts, as well as the finishing touches of readers, reviewers, and friends. It is, in fact, much the same sort of collaboration that the original Big Book represents: an act of good fellowship rather than an attempt to deliver the “final word.” We trust that what is presented here will become part of the continuing effort to uncover, debate, expand, and correct the history and origins of AA. The claims, points of view, and facts here represent our best collective effort to accurately put the origins of the Big Book in perspective, and will surely benefit from the further knowledge, opinions, and research of our readers.

After the presentation of the manuscript you will find three contributions, which are meant to provide further historical context for appreciating the manuscript:

- An annotated listing of the edits made to the manuscript gathered under five thematic topics provided by a lecturer and teacher on the Twelve Steps, with additional listings provided by Hazelden editorial staff
- A transcript of Bill Wilson’s speech on the origins of the Big Book given at the Texas State AA Convention in 1954
- A short publishing history of the Big Book by the AA historians who wrote the second essay, “The Big Book Revealed”

We offer these essays and other materials, not as the exhaustive or authoritative final word on this remarkable document, but as guideposts to help readers unlock their own individual interpretations and insights as they watch the text evolve before their eyes, and with hopes that the ideas revealed may come alive in their own hearts and minds.

The writers and contributors of the materials in this book (except for Bill Wilson’s speech) are currently members of AA and have chosen to remain anonymous.

— The Editor



Historical Context and Suggested Framework for Reading the Working Manuscript

This book presents a wonderful opportunity for anyone interested in the history of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. What you hold in your hands is a rare and valuable snapshot taken from a few critical weeks in 1939 that dramatically captures the controversy and creativity that went into producing the book that would explain AA's program of recovery to the world. In mid-February of that year, the members of Alcoholics Anonymous printed up multilith copies of their proposed book on how to recover from alcoholism. (Multilith is an offset printing process that was used at that time for small print runs.) These copies were distributed to AA members and to doctors and ministers for their comments and suggestions for changes. As those suggestions came in, they were all entered in one single multilith copy—the one reproduced in this book.

A PRIMARY DOCUMENT

This “original working manuscript” is a historical document of singular importance, combining within its pages several different stages in the writing of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. These overlapping layers in the creation of the final text can be discovered by carefully reading and “untangling” the different elements presented in the pages that follow.

The original working manuscript (hereafter referred to simply as “the working manuscript”) is what historians call a *primary* document—one that comes from a specific time and place, capturing all the complexity and immediacy of that particular moment. The working manuscript encapsulates and preserves the thinking of the people who were “founding” Alcoholics Anonymous during a very brief time period—six weeks or so—between the printing of the multilith copy in mid-February 1939, and the final editing of the first edition of the Big Book, which was done in late March or early April.

Like all important primary documents, the working manuscript should be approached with a clear understanding of its origins and history along with some appreciation for the time and place of its creation. Some of the more important “time and place” factors are briefly noted in the next section about the historical context of the document's development. Following that, you will find a suggested framework for reading the working manuscript—an orderly way to approach the different layers of the



manuscript and to make sense of the pages that may at first appear confusing. Once this context and the framework have been understood, the text can be more fruitfully read and studied.

Whether you are a scholar investigating the important spiritual movements of the twentieth century or simply a student of Big Book history, this working manuscript provides a unique glimpse into the creation and evolution of the recovery program that would eventually bring a “design for living” and sobriety to millions of people worldwide.

SOME HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While reading this amazing document, you can expand your understanding and appreciation by being mindful of the time period in which this book was written. Here are just a few of the important historical elements that affected and influenced the creation of the Big Book.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In 1938–1939, most of the world was still in the depths of the Great Depression. In the United States, the economy was not as dire as it had been three years earlier, but it was still just barely limping along. This had a direct effect on the ability of many marginal workers (for instance, alcoholics) to obtain jobs and to properly support their families. The language of the Big Book—especially in the chapters “To Wives,” “The Family Afterward,” and “To Employers”—is more understandable when seen in this context.

PROHIBITION

On a national level, Prohibition—America’s great experiment for ending “the drink problem”—had been a complete failure and was abandoned in 1933, less than six years before *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published. Prohibition was itself the result of over fifty years of intense political lobbying by the powerful Temperance Movement, which firmly believed that the best solution to the “alcohol problem” was to make it illegal. The Big Book presents a “new solution” to this problem, and the writing frequently points out these differences—for instance, it often declares that AA is addressing the problems of individual alcoholics rather than the problems of society as a whole. AAs wanted to be clear that they were not interested in legislating anyone’s drinking. Everyone involved in this writing project knew something of the Temperance Movement, and they had all been intimately involved in the recent failure of Prohibition.

THE OXFORD GROUP

Both Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson were, for considerable periods of time, active members of the Oxford Group—founded by Frank Buchman in 1921 using the name “A First Century Christian Fellowship”—and they were greatly influenced by both its structure and its beliefs. Bill Wilson clearly acknowledged the Oxford Group’s influence on Alcoholics Anonymous: “early A.A. got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgment of character defects, restitution for harm done and working with others straight from the Oxford Group . . . and from nowhere else.”¹



These and other Oxford Group influences can be found interwoven throughout the Big Book. In this working manuscript, you will also see a reaction against this influence—note, for example, the comment “This is absolutely Too Groupy” at the bottom of manuscript page 43.

THE “FLYING-BLIND PERIOD”

This was a world before Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. When the Big Book was published in April 1939, there were only two AA meetings in existence—a Tuesday night meeting in Brooklyn, New York, and one in Akron, Ohio, on Wednesday nights.

Today, we might fairly say that the book was written as a “meeting in print” and was intended as the primary vehicle for carrying the message of AA to people who had never heard of the group. This was surely the rationale for including a section of personal stories in the second half of the book.

In the foreword to the second edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Bill Wilson wrote that the time before the Big Book was published was the “flying-blind period.”²

This characterization is helpful in understanding the many decisions that went into the changes to the text that you will find here. AA takes a very pragmatic approach to alcoholism, and the evolving text reveals the founders’ struggles to understand what their own collective experience had been—“what has worked for us”—and then to write about it in a clear and concise way.

Finally, it should be noted that Bill Wilson, the primary author of this work, wrote the first version of the chapters “There Is a Solution” and “Bill’s Story” in late May or early June of 1938, when he was just three-and-a-half years sober. Bill was only four years sober when he wrote the first, full version of the Twelve Steps in December 1938. All of the other contributors to this book had even less sober time than that. Today, many AA members consider it nothing short of miraculous that this book was written by people with so little time in sobriety.

A MULTI-LAYERED TEXT

It is possible to discover at least five different “layers” buried in the text of the working manuscript: The multilith printing itself, the “accepted” changes, the “rejected” changes, the marginalia, and the “proof sheet” changes. Clearly identifying these layers can provide helpful insights into the thinking of AA’s founding members as they tried to describe their program of recovery in print for the first time.

Perhaps the best example of these different layers exists in the familiar reading that opens the chapter “How It Works”—which appears on pages 30 and 31 of the working manuscript.

THE MULTILITH PRINTING

The first layer is the multilith printing, on which the handwritten, suggested changes were added, resulting in the working manuscript presented here. This is the version of the Big Book as it was originally proposed in mid-February 1939. It is a remarkable document presenting AA’s “first pass” at the book that they hoped would “show other alcoholics PRECISELY HOW THEY CAN RECOVER” (wording taken from the manuscript foreword, which is on the unnumbered page before page 1).

The first two pages of “How It Works” reveal many interesting items, not least of which is the “original” version of the Twelve Steps. This manuscript presents a First Step that lacks the famous “We”



at the opening, as well as some significant variations on the other Steps that we are so familiar with today—including

- turning our will and our lives over to the “direction” of God in Step Three
- being entirely “willing” in Step Six
- getting “on our knees” and “holding nothing back” in Step Seven
- making “complete” amends in Step Eight
- improving “our contact with God” (with no “*as we understand Him*”) in the Eleventh Step
- a Twelfth Step that claims “a spiritual experience”³ is the result of “this course of action” and recommends that we try to carry this message “to others, especially alcoholics”

A favorite line of many readers of this multilith printing is the sentence that immediately follows the abc’s on page 31: “If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the book to this point or else throw it away!” This is one excellent example of the multilith printing’s presentation of Alcoholics Anonymous’s solution in a very “preachy” and directive format.

THE “ACCEPTED” CHANGES

The next layer in the text can be discovered among all the written notations themselves. This is the collection of changes suggested by doctors, psychiatrists, ministers, and members of AA that were incorporated into the text that was first published in April 1939.

Many of the “accepted” changes found in the opening to “How It Works” will be easily identified by anyone familiar with this reading. Here you will find “followed our path” substituted for “followed our directions” and “At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way” replacing “At some of these you may balk. You may think you can find an easier, softer way.” This move from directive language (“You must find Him now!”) to a softer and more suggestive tone (“May you find Him now!”) is typical of the suggested changes that eventually made their way into the book.

By carefully considering the exact meaning and tone of the deleted words and then comparing them with the tone and meaning of what replaced them, we can see the “working mind” of Bill Wilson and the members of Alcoholics Anonymous who helped him craft the final text.

And, if experts can someday identify all the writers of the different handwriting that entered these suggestions, we will gain even further insights into the creative process that resulted in the final text of the Big Book’s first edition.

THE “REJECTED” CHANGES

But there is another layer on these same pages that offers even greater insights into the thinking of those who created the Big Book—and these insights can only be found here, in the working manuscript. These are the suggestions that were submitted and written down here—but were *not* taken. The “accepted” changes could always be identified by comparing a multilith printing to a first-edition copy of the Big Book, but the “rejected” suggestions can only be seen in the copy that you now hold in your hands.

In the first page and a half of “How It Works,” you can see a number of these “rejected” suggestions—which are underlined on the next page—some of which were actually crossed out and others that were not:



- “Without help it was too much for us.” *[crossed out]*
- “then you are ready to take certain steps” has the partially erased line below it: here are the steps we took
- “We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. When we were receptive he responded.”
- “Admitted to our understanding of God, to ourselves, and to another human being . . .” *[crossed out]*
- Were entirely willing *[crossed out and changed to “ready”]*—*[comment that is crossed out]: “wouldn’t ‘anxious’ express greater humility?”*
- There is an all-but-undecipherable word or comment at the end of the Sixth Step that has been heavily crossed out, perhaps reading understood *[as in “God as we understood Him”?]*
- “improve our conscious contact with a power above us” *[crossed out]*
- rather than “tried to carry this message to alcoholics,” “offered the simple kit of spiritual tools but no compulsion could be said(?) we have tried to show others, especially alcoholics what etc.” *[crossed out]*
- “our personal adventures before and after, was the way we determined three pertinent ideas” *[crossed out]*
- “That faith could and did.”

These ten “rejected” changes, considered individually and collectively, provide important insights into what *was not* considered acceptable by the editors as they finalized these two most important pages of the Big Book.

The working manuscript has page after page of these “rejected” suggestions—each of which provides us with important information about “the mind of A.A.” at this early stage of its development.

Again, if handwriting experts can identify the authors of all the “rejected” suggestions, we might gain further insight into the book’s creation process—as well as some insight into the thinking of the writers themselves.

MARGINALIA

Then, what are we to make of the marginalia and interlinear notations that appear on so many pages of the working manuscript? Here are the fascinating and intriguing entries on just the first two pages of “How It Works”:

- There is a crossed-out note over the chapter title: “Should be studied from the mold angle.” *[See the handwritten note on manuscript page 156 for a clue to this mysterious bit of marginalia.]*
- There is a lightly written “11” in the top left corner of the first page and a “19” in the lower left. *[11 and 19 what?]*
- Just over the Third Step is the crossed-out word “Group” and a line connecting this “comment” to the boxed words “decision” and “and direction” in the Third Step. *[Was someone complaining*



about the Oxford Group “language” here?]

- The left margin of the first page has a number of what seem to be initials or possibly names that have been crossed out. *[What purpose did they serve here?]*
- “HGP” (Henry G. Parkhurst) has signed his initials to the bottom of these two pages. *[What was the purpose of this “sign-off” and why wasn’t Bill Wilson doing that?]*
- At the very bottom of the first page, someone has neatly printed: “His Divine Consideration.” *[Is that phrase supposed to be inserted into the Steps—and, if so, where?]*
- At the top of the second page, someone has written: “See inside back cover” with a connecting line to an erasure starting with the letter “B” and underlined twice—and below this is written “Buchman” (certainly a reference to Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group) and underlined once. *[Explaining all of those elements in a coherent fashion may be challenging!]*

Several of these notations help us understand the controversies and arguments among the various members of the small group of early AAs as they tried to agree on an edited text.

THE “PROOF SHEET” CHANGES

Finally, a careful reading of the first-edition printing of the Big Book reveals some edits that are not noted in this working manuscript copy.

There are two possible explanations for these last-minute changes. One asserts that there was a hand-marked “printer’s copy” of the multilith printing (which has since been lost) where further changes were added during their transcription from the working manuscript. The other possibility is that this working manuscript *was* the “printer’s copy,” and all of these final edits were made when Bill Wilson, Hank Parkhurst, Ruth Hock, and Dorothy Snyder made corrections to the proof sheets at Cornwall Press (see page 15 for additional details). Or, perhaps it was a combination of both.

The suggestion regarding a now-missing “printer’s copy” will be addressed separately in the pages that follow. Whatever the final resolution of that issue may be, it is clear that editorial changes were made as Bill, Hank, Ruth, and Dorothy reviewed proof sheets from the printer.

In 1954, when Bill Wilson was doing research for *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, he interviewed a number of “early timers” of AA, and several of these interviews were transcribed and later preserved at the GSO Archive in New York City. Bill’s August 1954 interview with Dorothy Snyder was particularly lively and wonderfully revealing and immediate in the way that, despite the casual language, it so vividly captures what happened during these last-minute edits:

Dorothy: Bill, do you remember when I was with you and Hank and Ruth, Cornwall (New York) that night before the book was done?

Bill: I should think I do. It was one of my precious moments.

Dorothy: Well, one of the things that I had told Ruth is the care with which that was done, even though psychiatrists, priests, ministers, and other people had given their opinions on the book, here it was ready to roll, I can still see you, we were reading parts, different phrases to you and you would weigh those phrases, did this really say what you meant,



would it really help somebody, would it offend this group, that group, or the other groups. And after one of those discussions, Hank was sort of pounding at you that a certain phrase was perhaps too strongly put, I can still hear you say, well, I don't want the thing to be so insipid that they don't want to get the idea that what they have to do to get sober.

Bill: Hank was going to water it down. On the other hand, it was that friction between [Jim] Burwell, Hank, and myself on the one side or Fitz Mayo on the other who wanted to draw in all the old-fashioned expressions out of which grew this concept of a book big enough to go through with. We had a hell of a rumpus about that. My position was that if you went overboard with the old expressions you could tell people and if you labeled it as a strictly Christian book you'd have to take in God knows what, and if on the other hand, we just make a psychological job of it nobody would get well from it anyway, so that was the problem.⁴

The differences between the beginning of “How It Works” in the working manuscript versus the first-edition printing of the Big Book are mostly cosmetic, although one of them—the wording to (c)—is certainly substantive:

- “Continue” has been changed back to “Continued” in Step Ten.
- “(c) That God could and did” has been edited to read “(c) That God could and would if sought.”⁵
- In the paragraph “The first requirement . . .” there is one small change: “even though our motives were good” is changed to “are good.”

While relatively minor, the changes in this section of the book are numerous. Each departure from the wording of the working manuscript will need to be identified by a careful reading and then evaluated for its importance.

Consequently, it is clear that the working manuscript is not a document to be read quickly or lightly, although it is just as obvious that by devoting sufficient attention and time to the text, the reader will be rewarded with interesting and important information about the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous.

THE PRINTER'S COPY

The working manuscript certainly served as a single collection point for all of the suggested changes to the Big Book text. But whether or not the working manuscript was the copy that Bill and Hank took to Cornwall Press and presented to the typesetters as the “printer's copy” is yet unknown.

When the working manuscript arrived at Sotheby's auction house in June 2004, the pages were no longer in their original red “comb” binding. Rather, they were bound in a “blue cloth binder with a morocco lettering piece (‘Printer's Copy M[anu]s[cript]).”⁶

Exactly when this new binding was created is not known. In a recorded talk by Barry Leach (Montreal, July 1995), the man to whom Lois Wilson gifted this copy (see page 15), he states that he currently owns the “printer's copy” of the Big Book—so Barry certainly thought that this was the copy used to set



the type for the Big Book. But whether the working manuscript was put into this “printer’s copy ms” binding by Bill or by Lois or by Barry himself is not known.

However, internal evidence—the messy and often difficult-to-decipher state of the working manuscript—would suggest that this was not the copy that Bill and Hank presented for typesetting.

For example, consider manuscript page 43, which contains most of the text on the Eleventh Step. This page is so loaded with cross-outs, inserts, and marginalia that it is even difficult for a reader familiar with the text to decipher it. Besides the many confusing inserts, some of the crossed-out text here did, in fact, appear in the first edition of the Big Book. And there are several suggested inserts that did not appear in that printing.

Who could make sense of this and produce the text found in the final book? It hardly seems likely that any reasonable person would entertain the possibility that this mélange of “yes’s,” “no’s,” and “maybe’s” could ever have been comprehensible to a typesetter. The person would have to have been a mind reader!

Still, Bill’s description of this encounter with the typesetter (written eighteen years after the event) does not clarify whether this working manuscript was what was offered for the production of galley proofs:⁷

Nothing now remained except to prepare the printer’s copy of the book. We selected one of the mimeographs, and in Henry [Parkhurst]’s clear handwriting all the corrections were transferred to it. There were few large changes but the small ones were very numerous. The copy was hardly legible and we wondered if the printer would take it, heavily marked up as it was. . . .

. . . [Arriving at the printing plant,] we brought with us the mangled but precious printer’s copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. When the Cornwall manager saw the mess our book was in he was so dismayed that he almost sent us home to make a fresh typing of the whole business. But salesman Henry prevailed upon him to try to make galleys, and day after day we corrected these as they issued from the shop.⁸

Certainly the working manuscript is “hardly legible,” “heavily marked up,” and a “mess,” and it might well be described as “mangled.” But it is just as certainly not, as described here, with “all the corrections” “in Henry’s clear handwriting.” And, indeed, we have much more here than just “all the corrections”—we’ve also got all those other untaken suggestions. Finally, Bill’s account begs the question: “Transferred” from where? Perhaps, it was transferred from the working manuscript. Or . . . perhaps not.

This will likely be one of those ongoing and unresolved historical questions—unless the “original printer’s copy” is eventually discovered.

Reading the “original working manuscript” is an exciting adventure for anyone interested in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*—whether readers have only an academic interest or just want to explore the history of the book that provides the foundation for their own sobriety. The examples above from the beginning of “How It Works” are brief and “suggestive only,” but they provide a glimpse of the many opportunities that you will discover here on almost every page—opportunities for hours of inspiring reading and exciting research.

May you enjoy and appreciate them all!



Notes

1. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), 39.
2. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), xvii.
3. The wording of the Twelfth Step was changed to read “having had a spiritual *awakening*” in 1941 when the second printing of the first edition went to press.
4. GSO Archive Filing Cabinet Drawer marked “Oral Histories,” *Box 2 of 2, Transcribed Oral Interviews: Draft “Ridgeway” Through “Wilson,” Box 1: 304680980*; file folders of oral history transcriptions made by Bill Wilson in 1954 in preparation for *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*; File folder marked: *Murphy, Dorothy Snyder/Akron OK; August 30, 1954*, pp. 28–29.
5. The current wording of this phrase “That God could and would if *He were* sought” did not appear until the first printing of the second edition in 1955.
6. Sotheby’s Auction Catalog, *Fine Books and Manuscripts Including Americana*, New York, June 21, 2007, p. 215.
7. Bill Wilson, along with other early AA members, can be fuzzy and inaccurate in the details of his recollections when delivered some time after the events mentioned—underlining the even greater importance and value of a primary document like this “original working manuscript.”
8. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 169–70.





The Big Book Revealed

What you have before you is a great revelation: the seminal source of arguably the most influential and important twentieth-century book on recovery from alcoholism and other drug addictions. The beneficial impact of AA and its cofounder Bill Wilson has been so great that Aldous Huxley once referred to Wilson as “the greatest social architect of the twentieth century.”¹

M. Scott Peck, psychiatrist and author, credits Bill Wilson with initiating an integration of spirituality and science, as well as originating the self-help and community movements. M. Scott Peck even associates AA with divine revelation, proposing that the revolution it started “is going to be the salvation . . . not only for alcoholics but . . . for us all.”²

Within these pages, you will see the celebrated Big Book “revealed” through the handwritten notations inscribed on the typescript of the 1939 multilith printing—sometimes referred to as “the original manuscript.”

According to Bill Wilson, as many as 400 copies of the multilith printing were distributed in February 1939 to “everyone we could think of who might be concerned with the problem of alcoholism.”³ Bill recalls his desire to get a wide range of responses; he wanted to “try it out, you know, on the preacher, on the doctor, the Catholic Committee on Publications, psychiatrists, policemen, fishwives, housewives, drunks, everybody. Just to see if we’ve got anything that goes against the grain anyplace and also to find out if we can’t get some better ideas.”⁴

Those involved in the great collaborative project that would become *Alcoholics Anonymous* had decided, in effect, to test-market the manuscript—to find out whether it would be “widely acceptable to everybody.”⁵ As these copies were returned, suggestions for revision were considered and written out on a master copy, resulting in the working manuscript (which is reproduced in this book). This working manuscript was ultimately the basis for galley proofs for the first printing of the Big Book on April 10, 1939.

As you will see, the working manuscript contains a number of changes, large and small, to the multilith copy, and it is the product of the many minds devoted to one of the most significant collaborative writing projects of all time. This working manuscript is, then, the missing link in our understanding of what transpired between the first complete draft of *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the first published edition. The many changes made in black, green, and red pencil on page after page of the working manuscript give



us a glimpse of the opinions, debates, and discussions that shaped and formed the text with clues to the full spectrum of suggestions, decisions, and revisions that led to the final text of the Big Book. Today, when so much writing is done on word processors, deletions and revisions are made with no visible history of the earlier thinking, no clues as to who made changes, and how or why the changes were made. Therefore, the working manuscript also represents a lost age when the creative process was more “visible” and allows us to re-experience a process that, in the age of technology, is much harder to access. Scholars and interested readers alike can now compare the working manuscript with the published first edition of the Big Book to reconstruct the editing process that took place when Bill Wilson, Hank Parkhurst, Ruth Hock, and Dorothy Snyder were reviewing the printer’s galley proofs in March 1939.

A SAMPLING OF EDITS IN THE WORKING MANUSCRIPT

It is especially fascinating to speculate why some material was crossed out in the working manuscript. For instance, on manuscript page 69, under heavy lead pencil strikeouts, we can read the following:

Some physicians favor cutting off the liquor sharply, and prefer to use little or no sedative. This may be wise in some instances, but for the most of us it is a barbaric torture. For severe cases, some doctors prefer a slower tapering-down process, followed by a health farm or sanitarium. Other doctors prefer a few days of de-toxification, removal of poisons from the system by cathartics, belladonna, and the like, followed by a week of mild exercise and rest.

This summary of physicians’ approaches is cut out, with the general, essential advice remaining: “The matter of physical treatment should, of course, be referred to your own doctor.” What was thought wrong with the excised section? Did one or more of the physicians who reviewed the multilith copy find it inaccurate? Or did the suggestion for this change come from some other, completely different, quarter? These are questions that may even occur to readers without access to the working manuscript, if they just compare the Big Book and the multilith copy to assess what was kept and what was changed. However, only the working manuscript adds an extra dimension to our understanding of this revision: Look closely at the words *under* the pencil strikeouts in the middle of manuscript page 69, and you’ll see that minor revisions were made *before* the lines were struck through completely. For instance, the phrase “to use” was changed to “using.” This tells us that, at one point in the editing process, these lines were to be retained, with only minor changes. But at some later point (when, why, and at whose instigation?), the entire section was deleted.

Let’s further examine the editing process by looking at one particular sentence: On manuscript page 38, the fourth full paragraph concludes with “You will know you are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.” The working manuscript changes “You will know you are on the Broad Highway . . .” to “We knew we were on the Broad Highway . . .” reflecting the overall tendency to emphasize the authors’ personal experience rather than to dictate to someone else. The published first edition of the Big Book makes it clear that Bill, Hank, Ruth, and Dorothy made *additional* changes to the galley proofs produced from the working manuscript; in this case, the published sentence is “We feel we are on the Broad Highway. . . .” By changing “knew” to “feel,” the authors move from past tense to



present tense and from the intellect (“knew”) to the senses (“feel”), stressing their own subjective experience. With the working manuscript, we can trace every step in this fascinating creative process.

In another example, there is a wonderful clue to a controversy about the publication of the Big Book that appears at the beginning of “Ace Full—Seven—Eleven,” a personal story that in the multilith copy follows page 141, and is notable for the green Xs striking through the story’s four pages. At the top of the first page, a note bearing Bill Wilson’s initials—“WGW,” for William Griffith Wilson—says, “Del Tryon’s story—Thought the book was racket and so withdrew this.”

Del Tryon’s withdrawal is clearly connected with a controversy surrounding the royalties for the Big Book—specifically, the allegation that Bill Wilson had reneged on a promise to share royalties with all of the contributors. Bill admits that questionable stories about his share of the profits were circulating, noting at one point, “They believed that I, the Wall Street promoter, had my truck backed right up to Mr. John D. Rockefeller’s strongbox and had persuaded him to fill it with coin for me and my friends.”⁶ Bill recalls Rockefeller himself admitting that he was “strangely stirred” by the Big Book project, while also questioning whether “money [was] going to spoil this thing.”⁷

Bill’s note in the working manuscript implies that there was no “racket” surrounding the book’s publication, and Bill certainly would not have been happy to see his book lose a story that could have added eight pages or more and given the book more heft and greater perceived value. Though the controversy remained about whether the Big Book financing and profits were part of a “racket,” the handwritten note on Del Tryon’s “Ace Full—Seven—Eleven” contributes to the intriguing stories about disputes surrounding the book’s beginnings.

A New Jersey psychiatrist referred to only as “Dr. Howard” is sometimes cited as one of the most significant “editors” of the multilith copy. It is he who insisted that the book be *descriptive* rather than *directive*, by calling for the removal of “you musts” and “you shoulds,” and substituting descriptions of what had worked for others. So, for instance, on manuscript page 39, in the sentence “Under no condition should you criticize such a person or be drawn into an argument with him,” the “should you” is replaced with “did we.” Similarly, later on this page, in the sentence “Do not dodge your creditors,” “Do not” is replaced with “we did not.” Attention to these kinds of changes was very thorough, including the briefest “paragraph” in the book, on page 44 of the multilith copy, which says, “It works—it really does. Try it.” In the working manuscript, “Try it” is deleted, most likely because it was thought to be too directive. These kinds of changes also correspond with the comment written on the inside back cover of the working manuscript (manuscript page 156):

We have said constantly the trouble with org[anized] religion is that they try to dogmatically pour people into moulds. So why should we give specific instructions in the book such as saying do this and do that?

The place of religion and spirituality in the book was one of the most important matters under dispute. Bill speaks of a “character” named Fitz M., “one of the most loveable people that A.A. will ever know. Fitz was a minister’s son and deeply religious, an aspect of his nature which is revealed in his story entitled ‘Our Southern Friend’ in the Big Book.”⁸ According to Bill, the dispute pitted Fitz against Henry Parkhurst and “a newcomer named Jimmy B., who like Henry was an ex-salesman and former atheist”:⁹



Fitz wanted a powerfully religious document; Henry and Jimmy would have none of it. They wanted a psychological book which would lure the reader in. . . . As we worked feverishly on this project Fitz made trip after trip to New York from his Maryland home to insist on raising the spiritual pitch of the A.A. book. Out of this debate came the spiritual form and substance of the document, notably the expression, “God *as we understood Him*,” which proved to be a ten-strike. As umpire of these disputes, I was obliged to go pretty much down the middle, writing in spiritual rather than religious or entirely psychological terms.¹⁰

Bill’s decision to give the book a spiritual rather than a religious character was a very astute “ten-strike,” since one of the features most important to AA’s worldwide success has been its openness to persons of all faiths and persuasions, and its refusal to advocate any sectarian, denominational, political, or cultural position or affiliation itself.¹¹

This is what the “newcomer” Jimmy B. had to say about the ultimate decision:

We had a definite formula that some sixty of us agreed was the middle course for all alcoholics who wanted sobriety, and that formula has not been changed one iota down through the years. I don’t think the boys were completely convinced of my personality change, for they fought shy of including my story in the book, so my only contribution to their literary efforts was my firm conviction—since I was still a theological rebel—that the word God should be qualified with the phrase “as we understand Him”—for that was the only way I could accept spirituality.¹²

On some level, each and every change in the working manuscript is significant. Take, for instance, the chapter “To Employers,” in which the advice on manuscript page 71 is that

No man should be fired just because he is alcoholic. If he wants to stop, he should be afforded a real chance. If he cannot, or does not want to stop, he should usually be discharged.

In the working manuscript, “usually” is crossed out, suggesting stricter advice to the employer and a less sympathetic view of the alcoholic who won’t quit.

Changes such as those, large and small, fill these pages, representing the dedicated group of writers and editors who shaped the tone, attitude, and precepts that have affected the lives of millions.

Along with the questions of what changes have been made, and why, there is the equally compelling question of whose handwriting we see here. As many as four or five different hands seem to be at work; uncovering how many there actually were, and who wrote what, will tell us much about the historical figures who were part of this great project. With this working manuscript available, handwriting analysts can get to work, perhaps determining whether the initials in the lower left corner of many pages belong to Henry (Hank) Parkhurst,¹³ and helping us to see where else in the working manuscript his hand appears, and to understand his role in the editing of this manuscript.

In addition to the challenge of identifying the different instances of handwriting in the working manuscript, there is the intriguing mystery of the cryptic marks and sentences that appear here and



there—for instance, the arithmetic on manuscript page 36, showing someone multiplying 750 by 24, and adding together 57 and 24. And then there are the doodles on manuscript page 33, including a small face drawn in the margin midway down the page. And what is meant by “You can obscure many alcoholics,” the final sentence written on manuscript page 156, in what may be Bill Wilson’s handwriting? With the working manuscript before us, we can now begin to consider such captivating questions.

THE FATE OF THE WORKING MANUSCRIPT

Bill Wilson, Hank Parkhurst, Ruth Hock, and Dorothy Snyder (first wife of Clarence H. Snyder, the founder of AA in Cleveland) took the revised manuscript to Cornwall Press in March 1939. One account has it that when they got there, the Cornwall plant manager nearly refused the manuscript once he got a look at all the handwritten changes. But instead of insisting that it be retyped, the manager agreed to proceed with the job, on the condition that galley proofs be reviewed and corrected as soon as they were printed. So for the next few days, Bill, Hank, Ruth, and Dorothy remained in Cornwall, proofreading galleys.¹⁴ The first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published on April 10, 1939. (See page 219 for a short history of the Big Book following the first printing.)

The working manuscript remained in Bill Wilson’s possession until his death in 1971, when it was inherited by his wife, Lois. Seven years after Bill died, Lois Wilson wanted to give her dear friend Barry Leach a very special New Year’s gift. Barry and Lois were close, and they had what might be most accurately described as a devoted “mother and son” relationship. As Lois got older, Barry was the companion whom she frequently chose to accompany her whenever she traveled around the country, and they spent considerable time together at Stepping Stones, the Wilsons’ home in Bedford Hills, New York. Barry was also the author of the book *Living Sober* and had actively helped Lois when she wrote her autobiography, *Lois Remembers*.

Lois decided to give Barry the working manuscript, and her inscription to him can be seen on the presentation leaf of the manuscript. When Barry died in 1985, his family inherited the manuscript. Eventually, it found its way into the hands of another AA member named Joseph B., who put it on the auction block at Sotheby’s in New York in June 2004.¹⁵

A California man acquired it for \$1.56 million, and three years later put it up for auction yet again. The current owners won the working manuscript with a bid of \$850,000 (\$992,000 with commission) at Sotheby’s in New York on June 21, 2007. On that momentous day, they sent their daughter to Sotheby’s as their proxy. An auction novice, she sat alone in the back of the saleroom and held her cell phone open so her parents could hear the proceedings. She raised her paddle at \$850,000. Her father recalled the event: “I heard ‘850 in the back’ and knew it was her. Something came over me, and I knew we got it. I went numb I was so thrilled.”¹⁶

Here is the description by Sotheby’s for the June 21, 2007, auction:

The working draft manuscript of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (published in April 1939), being an original multilith copy with a multitude of annotations and revisions by several founders of AA (some by William Griffith Wilson [aka “Bill W.”], but most in the hand of Hank Parkhurst), 161 pages (three of which are written in pencil by several hands);¹⁷ 11 x 8 1/2 .; 280 x 215 mm; Newark, NJ, 1938–1939; the annotations and



revisions in lead, green, and red pencil (with a few in ink), lightly browned. Each leaf encased in mylar and bound in a blue cloth binder with a morocco lettering piece (“Printer’s Copy M[anu]s[cript]”); joints and corners rubbed. With a presentation leaf bound in inscribed by Lois Wilson (Bill’s widow): “I joyfully give this multilith copy of the AA book, one of my most precious possessions, to you, dear Barry [probably Barry Leach, who wrote a biography of her], as evidence of my deep gratitude for all you have done for AA, for Al-Anon, & particularly for me . . . 1/1/78.”¹⁸

THE AFTERMATH

Sotheby’s claim that *Alcoholics Anonymous* is one of the most influential books of the twentieth century is exemplified by the 1999 decision of *Time* magazine to name Bill Wilson one of the “*Time* 100 Persons of the Century.”

As detailed in the section in the back of this book entitled “The Publication of *Alcoholics Anonymous: A Short History*,” since the first publication of the Big Book, sales of its four editions in hardback and softcover printings have exceeded 27 million copies in the United States and Canada alone. Copies have also been made available in a braille and large-print edition, in sign language, on audiotapes and CDs, and on the Internet. The text has been translated into at least fifty-two languages.

In other words, “God as we understand Him,” the Fellowship of AA, and the Big Book have saved millions of alcoholics from death and given them a new way of life. The book and the AA Fellowship are viewed as the gold standard among the worldwide community of Twelve Step groups. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., (AAWS) has granted permission to over four hundred other fellowships to use and adapt the Big Book and its Twelve Steps. As early as 1946–1951, groups like the WANA Society in New York (an organization of former mental patients), “Addicts Anonymous” in Kentucky, and “Narcotics Anonymous” in California (a precursor of today’s NA) were using AA’s Twelve Steps, often in pamphlet form. *Gamblers Anonymous* was published in 1984. A great number of other anonymous groups—including those for overeaters, codependents, people with dual recovery issues, marijuana addicts, sex addicts, and people with depression—have used and adapted the Twelve Steps and counted AA’s Big Book as their spiritual godfather.

Amid the wealth of literature on Alcoholics Anonymous, you have in your hands the greatest treasure of all, the beginning of it all, the charter of the Fellowship. *Fine Books and Collections* ranks this auction purchase among the top ten of 2007, along with the Magna Carta, and comparing the working manuscript of the Big Book to the “Great Charter”¹⁹ of our constitutional liberty is not all that far-fetched. Both great works offer us freedom from oppression, and both have—in different ways—changed the world for the better. But finally, the value of this book is measured by the people it touches. As many AA members would say, “What’s a book worth that saves your life?”



Notes

1. Francis Hartigan, *Bill W.: A Biography of Alcoholics Anonymous Cofounder Bill Wilson* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001), 4.
2. From "Addiction: The Sacred Disease," a sound recording available at www.sobrietytalks.com.
3. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), 165. Bill W. adds that "Each mimeograph was stamped 'loan copy' in order to protect our coming copyright." According to Charles Bishop, some mimeographs not marked "loan copy" have been discovered (correspondence, October 27, 2008).
4. Bill Wilson, "How the Big Book Was Put Together," talk delivered on June 12, 1954, Fort Worth, TX (available at www.sobrietytalks.com).
5. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 165.
6. *Ibid.*, 193.
7. Wilson, "How the Big Book Was Put Together" talk.
8. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 17.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Bill W. recalls his feeling that "This thing is overloaded with Gods. . . . You got these guys on their knees, stand 'em up!" ("How the Big Book Was Put Together" talk).
12. Jimmy B.'s story, "The Vicious Cycle," was not included in the first edition of the Big Book but was inserted beginning with the first printing of the second edition in 1955. He is quoted here from *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), 229.
13. Parkhurst, an alcoholic whose sponsor was Bill Wilson, also became Bill's partner in Honor Dealers, the auto supply company the two men formed. They also formed Works Publishing Company, which published the first edition.
14. Charlotte Hunter, Billye Jones, and Joan Zieger, *Women Pioneers in 12 Step Recovery* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1999), 81–82.
15. Felicia R. Lee, "My Name Is the Big Book. My Future Is Open," *New York Times*, June 14, 2004, available online at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B01E7DF1030F937A25755C0A9629C8B63> (accessed 10/26/2008).
16. Ian McKay, P. Scott Brown, Karen Edwards, Jonathan Shipley, Joyce Godsey, and Ellen Firsching Brown, "50 Top Auction Sales of 2007," www.finebooksmagazine.com/issue/0602/topten-1.phtml (accessed 11/02/08).
17. The printer's manuscript actually consists of 162 typewritten pages (including the title page and foreword), three handwritten pages of revision notes, the dedication page (handwritten), and a partial table of contents page at the back (also handwritten), for a total of 167 pages.
18. Lot Details: Sotheby's—New York—2007, Lot 149 (Alcoholics Anonymous), www.artfact.com/catalog/viewLot.cfm?lotCode=GTRIN230 (accessed 10/11/08).
19. McKay et al., "50 Top Auction Sales of 2007," www.finebooksmagazine.com/issue/0602/topten-1.phtml (accessed 11/02/08).



The Original Working Manuscript



LOANED COPY

I joyfully give this multilith
copy of the Ad book, one of my most
precious possessions, to you, dear Barry,
as evidence of my deep gratitude for all
you have done for
Ad, for Al-Dun, and particularly
for me,

Les

1/1/78

[Handwritten flourish]
A L C O H O L I C S

A N O N Y M O U S

Published by:

Works Publishing Co.,
~~17 William St.,~~
~~Newark, N. J.~~

Box 659
WJC

Roos grasped his Despite the living example
of my father there were in me
the vestiges of my old prejudice.
The word God still aroused a
certain antipathy. When the thought
was expressed that there might be
a God ^{with} me this idea was
unintended. I did not like the
idea. I could go for such concepts
as the Fiat, Universal M, or
spirit of nature but I resented the
thought of a Creator of the universe
however benign this agency might be.
I have since talked with scores of men
who felt the same way.

My father said what then seemed
a novel idea. He said, "Why do
you choose your own name of God?"

That state but in hand.
It melted the very intellectual
mountain where I had
had lived & showed
warm eyes. I stood in
the sun ^{light} at last.

~~It was only a matter of
being willing to be in a
pen like them myself. Nothing
more was my job to make
myself. I saw that growth could
start for that point upon a farm of
Camp wilderness I wrote but
what I saw in my life
would I be it? of course I was!~~

1 - Business chapter should be rewritten.

2 - Correct for minor errors



3 Physiological urge or necessity

Urge for drink, eat chocolate -

Indefinable urge to do something

Grab a drink of chocolate -

office address should be set.

- sentence - Explain that

you are never not helped by

any doctor or psychiatrist.

Change -

OK by
J. J. J.

How about Alcoholic
Foundation set up?

OK

~~started~~

FOREWORD

~~OK~~
we have recovered

The alcoholic

We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics PRECISELY HOW THEY CAN RECOVER is the main purpose of this book. For them, we ~~trust~~ ^{think} these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We ~~trust~~ ^{think} this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not ~~comprehend~~ ^{understand} that ~~he~~ ^{she} is a ~~very~~ ^{very} sick person. And besides, we are sure that our ~~way~~ ^{way} of living has its advantages for all.

It is important that we remain anonymous because we are too few, at present, to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which will result from this publication. Being mostly business or professional folk we could not well carry on our occupations in such an event. We would like it clearly understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation. ~~only, to whom~~ when writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as "A Member of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Very earnestly we ask the press also, to observe this request, for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped.

We are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word. There are no fees nor dues whatsoever. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect, or denomination, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted.

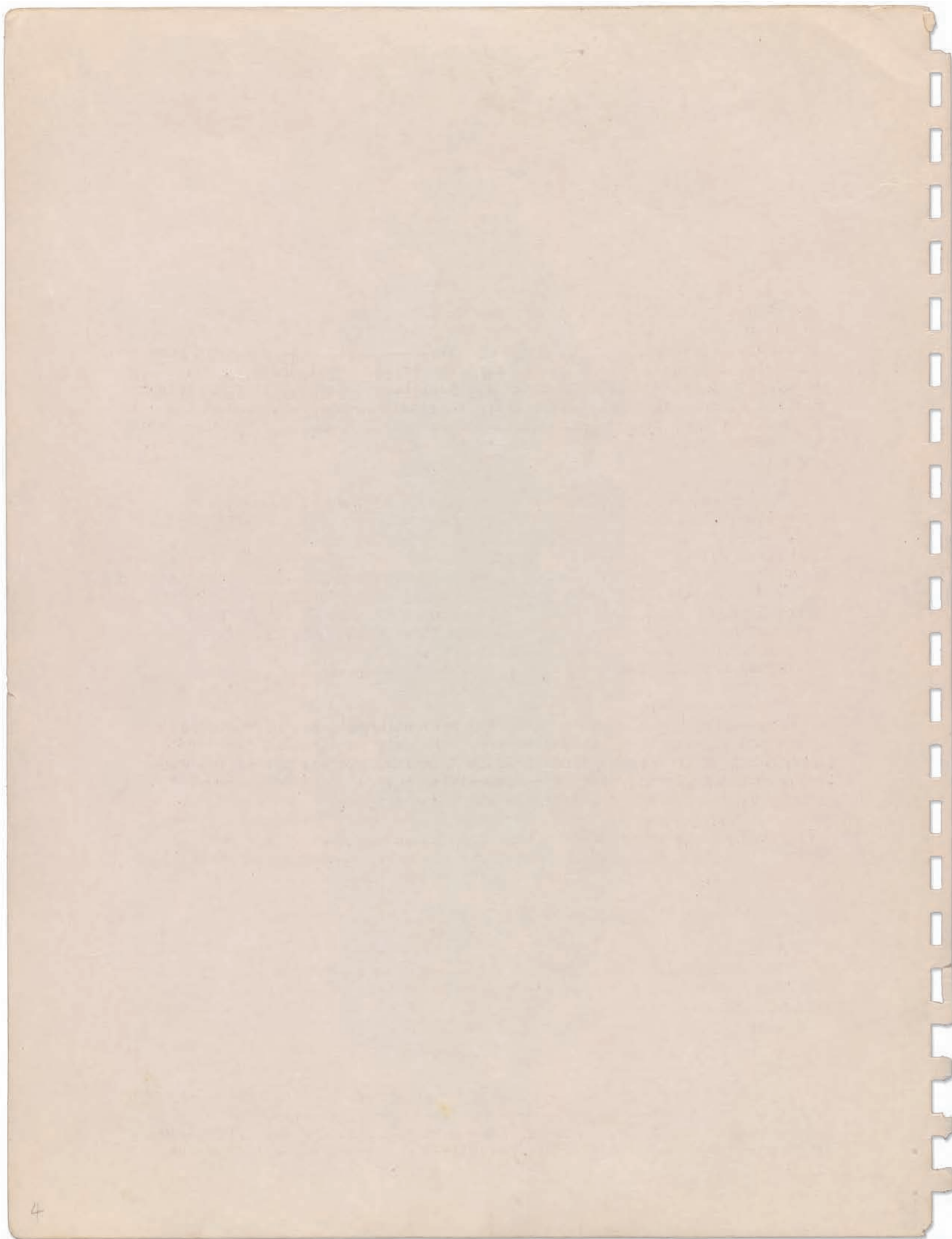
We shall be interested to hear from those who are getting results from this book, particularly from those who have commenced work with other alcoholics. We shall ~~try to contact~~ ^{should like to be helpful to} such cases.

Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed. ~~(See also 7.)~~

~~(This multilith volume will be sent upon receipt of \$3.50, and the printed book will be mailed, at no additional cost, as soon as published.)~~

Separate
only notion
of pet ow
back-
Actually
The field
needs
workers.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
Post Box xxx
New York City



1 *Printer*

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

We of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the reader will be interested in the medical estimate of the plan of recovery described in this book. Convincing testimony must surely come from medical men who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health. A well known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction, gave Alcoholics Anonymous this letter:

To Whom It May Concern:

I have specialized in the treatment of alcoholism for many years.

About four years ago I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent business man of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.

In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered.

I personally know thirty of these cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities of rapid growth inherent in this group they mark a new epoch in the annals of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.

You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves.

Very truly yours,
(Signed) - - - - M.D.

The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what anyone who has suffered alcoholic torture must believe -- that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It does not satisfy us to be told that we cannot control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have a kind of allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-alcoholics, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many

2/24/40



million volumes within two years time. Should this come, over nine-hundred dollars per share would be returned.” Bill Wilson later admitted that at that time they “did not sell even one of our proposed 600 shares of Works Publishing, cheap as we claimed it was,” citing New York alcoholics who said, “You fellows have certainly got nerve. What made you think that we would buy stock in a book not yet written?”¹⁸

The final page of the prospectus consisted of a subscription form for the purchase of stock:

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

SUBSCRIPTION

Date:

On the basis of being a charter subscriber, I hereby subscribe for Twenty Five Dollar par value non-convertible shares of The One Hundred Men Corporation to be formed.

My check for is attached which is in full payment—partial payment (CROSS OUT ONE)

In case this check is paid in person, I agree to pay no more amount in money, stock, notes, and one hundred and ninety days from this date.

Signed:

Name Address:

City:

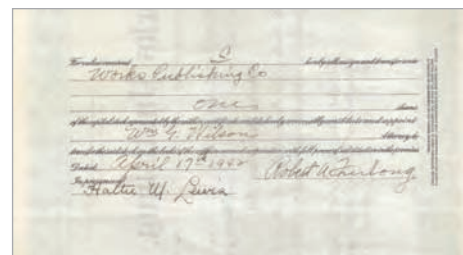
State:

CHECKS MAY BE MADE PAYABLE TO:
THE ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION or to: HENRY G. PARKHURST, Inc.

PLEASE MAIL TO:

HENRY G. PARKHURST, Inc. WILLIAM J. RICHIELL
11 Willow Street 608 Harvey Street
Newark, New Jersey Hackensack, New Jersey

Here we see a reproduction of one of the \$25 stock certificates:



There are a number of differing views about how the Big Book was actually financed. It is also unclear what the actual publishing and royalty rights were, or how well the objectives of Bill Wilson and his partner were met with regard to them. Though the details are too unwieldy to address here, it is interesting to see how the Northern New Jersey General Service Area 44 Web site describes the stock offering:

Board Trustee Frank Amos arranged a meeting between Bill and Eugene Exman (Religious Editor of Harper Brothers publishers). Exman offered Bill a \$1,500 advance (\$19,400 in 2003 dollars) 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 in 2003 dollars). 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 in 2003 dollars), 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.¹⁹

You can read Bill Wilson's perspective on all of this in the transcript of his talk at the Texas State AA convention in 1954, which begins on page 205 of this book.

EARLY BOOK REVIEWS

Free publicity for the Fellowship was a high priority in the early days. In 1939, Bill and Hank were talking with editors of *Reader's Digest*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* magazines. All had huge national circulations, so an article in any of them about the forthcoming book would have been phenomenal. However, "the first break," as Bill Wilson put it, was to come from elsewhere:

In September 1939, *Liberty* magazine, then headed by our great friend-to-be Fulton Oursler, carried a piece called "Alcoholics and God," written by one Morris Markey. There was an instant response. About 800 letters from alcoholics and their families poured in.²⁰

The *Liberty* article began by declaring, "Is there hope for habitual drunkards? A cure that borders on the miraculous—and it works!"²¹

According to Lois Wilson, "*Liberty* was swamped with mail. It forwarded 800 inquiries, including 350 book orders, to the small Works Publishing Company office."²² In his biography, Francis Hartigan writes of the Big Book's early success as taking place in fits and starts:

The book may not have been selling, but there were some small victories on the AA front . . . Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote a glowing review, and its appearance in religious journals and other religious publications garnered AA some extremely positive recognition. Even so, virtually no books were sold. . . . On June 25, 1939, *Alcoholics Anonymous* received a favorable review in *The New York Times*, but it didn't sell any books. . . . [After the *Liberty* magazine article], the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* ran the first of a series of articles on AA, backed with editorials praising the organization. . . . The *Plain Dealer* articles produced hundreds of responses in the greater Cleveland area. . . . In February 1940, reviews in *Newsweek* and *Time* also produced some inquiries and sales, though they remained modest.²³

A famous article about AA written by Jack Alexander in the March 1, 1941, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* produced hundreds of inquiries, and AA saw its membership jump from approximately 2,000 to 8,000 in just a year's time. In the *New York Times*, Percy Hutchison said that the program was "more soundly based psychologically than other treatment of the subject I have ever come upon."²⁴

And William D. Silkworth, the doctor who wrote the two letters in "The Doctor's Opinion" section of the Big Book, also published an essay, called "A New Approach to Psychotherapy in Chronic



Alcoholism,” in the scholarly *Journal-Lancet* in July 1939. Here, Silkworth mentioned the new book called *Alcoholics Anonymous* and spoke of its potential to grow in influence:

By contacting personally those who are getting results from the book, these ex-alcoholics expect to establish new centers. Experience has shown that as soon as any community contains three or four active members, growth is inevitable, for the good reason that each member feels he must work with other alcoholics or perhaps perish himself.²⁵

One of America’s most prominent religious leaders, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, reviewed “this extraordinary book” in 1939 and wrote, “Gothic cathedral windows are not the sole things which can be truly seen only from within. Alcoholism is another. All outside views are clouded and unsure. Only one who has been an alcoholic and has escaped the thralldom can interpret the experience.”²⁶

In an October 14, 1939, article, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* offered the following dismissive praise for Alcoholics Anonymous: “The one valid thing in the book is the recognition of the seriousness of addiction to alcohol. Other than this, the book has no scientific merit or interest.”²⁷

The September 1940 issue of the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* also slammed the Big Book with the following statement: “Of the inner meaning of alcoholism there is hardly a word. It is all the surface material.”²⁸ However, a fall 1940 review in the *News-Letter of the American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers* was laudatory, saying, “There is a sincerity and enthusiasm about the writing of this work that commands attention. *Alcoholics Anonymous* seems to have succeeded in cases where the physician, the clergyman, the psychiatrist, or the social worker have failed.”²⁹

BIG BOOK ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATIONS

Beginning in 1973, AA began presenting millionth copies of the Big Book to individuals it believed had made important contributions to AA and to the study and treatment of alcoholism. Here is a partial list of such presentations, with some selected commentary:

<i>Big Book Copy</i>	<i>Presented by</i>	<i>Presented to</i>	<i>Date</i>
One millionth	Dr. John L. Norris, Nonalcoholic Chair, U.S. President AA GS Board (at the White House)	Richard M. Nixon	April 16, 1973
Two millionth	Lois Wilson	Joseph Califano Jr., U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare	June 6, 1979

During the presentation of the two-millionth Big Book, Secretary Califano said,

I am asking all of our federally supported treatment programs to seek out A.A. organizations in the areas they serve, and to work with them so that recovering alcoholics leaving our programs will be fully aware of the support A.A. stands ready to give. . . . I am directing that in the guidelines for federal grants supporting treatment programs, and in the review process that determines the award of these grants, the supporting role



of Alcoholics Anonymous be recognized and specific cooperative arrangements be spelled out.³⁰

<i>Big Book Copy</i>	<i>Presented by</i>	<i>Presented to</i>	<i>Date</i>
Five millionth	AA Fellowship	Ruth Hock, nonalcoholic, first AA secretary	July 1985

Ruth Hock said that the Big Book would not have been written without Bill Wilson and that it would not have been published without Hank Parkhurst. Parkhurst wrote all but the opening paragraph of the chapter “To Employers,” and his personal story, “The Unbeliever,” was in all sixteen printings of the first edition.³¹

<i>Big Book Copy</i>	<i>Presented by</i>	<i>Presented to</i>	<i>Date</i>
Ten millionth	Michael Alexander, nonalcoholic, acting chair, AA	Nell Wing, first AA archivist, A.A. International Seattle, WA	July 1990
Fifteen millionth	Jim Estelle, nonalcoholic, acting chair AA GSB	Ellie Norris, widow of former GSB Chairman Dr. John L. Norris	April 21, 1996
Twenty millionth	Elaine Johnson, Ph.D., nonalcoholic, AA International AA GSB vice-chair	Al-Anon Family Groups Minneapolis, MN	July 2, 2000
Twenty-five millionth	Allen Ault, class A trustee, warden, San Quentin Prison	Jill Brown Toronto, CA	July 1, 2005

A 2005 newsletter from the General Service Office of AA reports the presentation of the twenty-five millionth copy:

In 1942, Warden Clinton Duffy of San Quentin Prison pioneered the first A.A. group behind prison walls. Twenty-eight inmates were present at that first meeting in September 1942; today [September 2005], there are 2,562 prison groups and over 70,000 inmate A.A. members. . . . Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Allen Ault, in appreciation of Warden Duffy for his contribution to helping alcoholics, presented the 25 millionth copy of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, to Warden Jill Brown of San Quentin, “on behalf of all the correctional facilities and their inmate populations where the A.A. message of hope is welcomed.”³²



Through the years, then, sales of the Big Book have been the focus of celebrations and commemorations that highlight its tremendous impact. And, given the fun-loving character of many AA members, it has been the focus of lighthearted and mildly irreverent moments as well. AA historian Charles Bishop Jr. recalls a West Virginia AA conference where the main speaker was an AA member with fifty years of sobriety, who had written numerous *AA Grapevine* articles. After his talk, the old-timer was given a Big Book signed by many present. Accepting the gift, he jokingly replied, “Gee, thanks. I’ve always wanted to read this book.” The laughter that followed typifies the lightheartedness and recurring humor in the Alcoholics Anonymous Fellowship. For, as Bill Wilson himself wrote, “We aren’t a glum lot.”³³

NON-AA PUBLISHERS OF THE BIG BOOK

An event in 1985 sent shock waves through the Fellowship and Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.: Jon S. of Akron published a replica of the 1939 first-edition Big Book. Jon discovered that AAWS had failed to renew the original copyright and so the book was now in the public domain; this meant that, as in the case of the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, anyone could reprint it. The first-edition copyright had expired in 1967, and the second-edition copyright in 1983. The General Service Conference of AA recommended in 1977 that “publication of a facsimile of the first edition of the Big Book should NOT be undertaken as it would destroy the sentimental value of the actual first edition.”³⁴

Nonetheless, Jon’s company, Carry The Message, published a reprint of the first edition and titled it, *Alcoholics Anonymous, 50th anniversary of Big Book, 1985 facsimile of the original red 1939 first edition*. The book was hardbound in red cloth and had a reproduction of the “circus” dust jacket.

In 1992, Intergroup World Service, Inc. (not affiliated with AAWS) of Croton Falls, New York, reprinted the 1939 first edition of the AA Big Book in paperback. IWS sold it for \$2.50 or in quantity for 55¢ to 85¢. This edition included the foreword, “The Doctor’s Opinion,” the first 179 pages (the 1955 second edition marked the shift to 164 pages for the book’s first half, ending with “A Vision for You”), and Dr. Bob’s story, and also contained a U.S. and Canadian phone list in the back. IWS sold thousands. Many AA groups bought as many as 100 copies at a time and gave them away. In the first year alone, IWS gave away about 2,000 copies and sold the remainder of the initial printing of 4,500. The cost per book to IWS (including printing, paper, cover material, and shipping) was 45¢.

THE BIG BOOK INDEXES AND CONCORDANCE

AA members are prone to quoting from the Big Book, and their need for quick and accurate quotes inevitably led to the publication of numerous indexes. Some were simple bookmarks with twenty or thirty key words or quotes and page numbers in the Big Book. Others were booklets.

The largest and most comprehensive concordance is *A Concordance to “Alcoholics Anonymous,”* compiled by Stephen A. Poe and Frances E. Poe, 955 pages. Now out of print, this book sported pages in three columns and enabled the reader to look up any word or phrase in the third edition of the Big Book. None of these sources has achieved the status of “AA Conference-approved literature,” and AAWS has declined to publish either an index or a concordance to the Big Book.



THE AAWS PAPERBACK TRAIL

In 1993, the Literature Committee of the General Service Conference recommended that AAWS produce a pocket-sized paperback version of the Big Book with all front matter (preface, various forewords, and “The Doctor’s Opinion”), basic text, Dr. Bob’s story, and appendices. But in 1958, in a floor action, the conference had recommended that a paperback edition of the Big Book not be published. In 1976, the Literature Committee and the conference in a floor action recommended that AA keep the Big Book as is and not publish a paperback edition. Again, in 1987, a conference committee concluded that although there was some desire to publish the first 181 pages of the Big Book in softcover, there was not sufficient need at that time.³⁵

So, for thirty-five years, AAWS did not reprint the Big Book in paperback. However, less than a year after IWS published its paperback reprint, AAWS did print its own paperback edition. AAWS’s first printing of the newly AA-approved paperback was 100,000 copies. Interestingly, AAWS used the same printing company as IWS: Rose Printing of Tallahassee, Florida. The completed AAWS book had sixteen fewer pages than the IWS paperback. Thus, the AAWS paperback was printed at the identical plant, on the identical presses, and bound in the same bindery by the same workers.

As of 2008, AAWS continues to print its paperback. There had been a substantial dispute between IWS and AAWS over the matter of publishing a paperback; however, in 1995, the dispute was settled. Shortly thereafter, IWS was dissolved, and a publisher called the Anonymous Press took over printing the former IWS paperback as well as a replica of the original 1939 Big Book in both hardback and softcover. According to John G. of IWS, the Anonymous Press continues to sell thousands of copies.³⁶

Two other books with small print runs reprinted portions of the original AA Big Book. In one case, a spiral-bound book without a named publisher appeared on the scene. It contained a reproduction of the “circus” cover, front page, and back cover of the Works Publishing, Inc., first edition. It also contained a replica of the blue and white cover of the second edition, as well as two pages with material on the first twenty-nine meetings in Cleveland and a list of other meetings. Some identifying notes follow:

This is a complete set of stories no longer in print as they appeared in the first and second editions of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is a collection of 32 original stories, seven from the First Edition of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. These stories are not in the Third Edition. We hope they may be helpful for all men and women who have a desire to continue to stay sober today. This is the sole purpose of this effort!!! June, 1992.

Another book with a small print run was titled *A Simple Program: A Contemporary Translation of the Book “Alcoholics Anonymous”* by “J.,” 1st ed. (New York: Hyperion, 1996), paperback, 162 pages.

THE ISSUE OF “AA GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE-APPROVED LITERATURE”

In 1951, AA’s General Service Conference Literature Committee recommended that AA literature have conference approval. Such approval can be denoted in a number of ways in AA publications. One example can be found on the copyright page of the fourth edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Another



example can be found in *Came to Believe*, and still another in *The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous: Biographical Sketches: Their Last Major Talks*.

For some reason, many in the AA Fellowship have come to view the phrase “Conference-approved literature” as a dictum that excludes from AA discussion and AA literature tables any literature that does not carry this mark of AA endorsement. However, AA has no index of forbidden books. Nonetheless, ever since the 1951 recommendation, the phrase “This is AA General Service Conference-approved literature” has often been misunderstood in its application to so-called outside literature. Every AA group is autonomous and thus can read and sell whatever the group conscience decides. The General Service Conference cannot approve or disapprove any books published outside of AA.³⁷

The Big Book existed long before the General Service Conference.³⁸ And before the Big Book or any “conference-approved” literature was published, members of Alcoholics Anonymous often read the Bible, devotionals such as the *Upper Room*, *The Runners Bible*, and *My Utmost for His Highest*, as well as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James,³⁹ *The Meaning of Prayer* by Fosdick, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and *Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox. They also read four “Pamphlets Published by AA OF AKRON,” published in Akron, Ohio.⁴⁰

AA members still read these and a host of other books. As Bill Wilson writes in the Big Book’s first edition, “There are many helpful books also. Suggestions about these may be obtained from one’s priest, minister, or rabbi. Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.”⁴¹

AA RESEARCH AND WRITING

In 1979, Hazelden Educational Services published Ernest Kurtz’s title *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Kurtz had been given extensive access to the archives of the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous. His book became the inspiration for a subsequent, phenomenal explosion of research, collecting, writing, archiving, and educating about the history of this “bunch of nameless drunks”⁴² and its profound influence on the modern world.

Hundreds of Fellowship members and alcoholism treatment professionals began pouring out a rainbow of books, and many—laypeople, professionals, even critics—have since become collectors and archivists of AA’s history. Many have published commentaries on the Big Book itself.

Publications have been breathtaking in scope—biographies, autobiographies, histories, meditation books and pamphlets, Twelve Step guides, indexes and bibliographies, and thousands of scholarly journal articles. There has been renewed research into pre-AA organizations, such as the Washingtonian Temperance Society and the Oxford Group. Today’s Internet abounds with resources: As of February 29, 2009, a Google search yields over 2,650,000 hits for Alcoholics Anonymous.

But as these various publications and commentaries come and go, we will always return to the source, the Big Book, the book that started it all.



Notes

1. Lois W., *Lois Remembers: Memoirs of the Co-Founder of Al-Anon and Wife of the Co-Founder of Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 153.
2. *Lois Remembers*, 114.
3. *Ibid.*, 114–15.
4. Susan Cheever, *My Name Is Bill: Bill Wilson—His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 153.
5. *'Pass It On': The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984), 203.
6. Peebles' name appears on a draft manuscript of *Dr. Bob* owned by Dick B.
7. *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), 71.
8. *Ibid.*, 215.
9. *'Pass It On'*, 205.
10. Mitchell K., "The Big Book Goes to Press," <http://alcoholism.about.com/library/blmitch14.htm> (accessed 10/31/08).
11. For this number, see, for example: "Alcoholics Anonymous Big Books 1939 First Editions, First Printings," <http://abookman.com/Big%20Book.htm> (accessed 10/11/08), and Mitchell K., "The Big Book Is Published," http://silkworth.net/mitchellk/articles/bb_published.html (accessed 10/11/08).
12. See www.aa.org/bigbookonline/en_personalstories.cfm (accessed 10/11/08).
13. *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), 455.
14. For this figure, see, for example: "Big Book Timeline," <http://rocbigbook.com/Big%20Book%20Timeline.pdf> (accessed 10/11/08).
15. On the matter of whether the book should have gone with an established commercial publisher, Bill W. says, "Why would we want our main means of propagation in the hands of somebody else?" (Bill Wilson, "How the Big Book Was Put Together," talk delivered on June 13, 1954, Fort Worth, TX, available at www.sobrietytalks.com.)
16. "The Big Book Prospectus" (Wheeling, WV: Bishop of Books, 1991).
17. Bill Wilson's secretary Nell Wing informed Ray G., archivist at Dr. Bob's home, that there were only 70-plus men who were sober at the time the Big Book writing was undertaken. There were no women as yet; but, as is pointed out elsewhere in this essay, the phrase "and women" was eventually added.
18. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of AA* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), 157–58.
19. "History and Archives Web Facts," <http://www.nnjaa.org/area44/archives-webfacts.htm> (accessed 10/11/08). This quote from the Northern New Jersey General Service Area 44 Web site was chosen for the compactness of its explanation and for the utility of the citations it provided. As that Web site observes, its information is said to have come from five different sources. Readers are invited to examine all of the quoted sources because they present a very complex, tangled, and controversial set of facts. The biography of Bill W. by Francis Hartigan perhaps signaled some of the difficulties one encounters when trying to present an accurate description of the incorporating and publishing events. Hartigan writes: "Because the Twelve Steps have long been the treatment model embraced by nearly all substance-abuse treatment programs, it is hard to imagine that they could have been produced amid swirls of controversy. Yet, before the book-writing project, precisely how the by now one hundred alcoholics in Akron and New York had recovered had never been documented. When the project got under way, there seemed to be nearly as many programs of recovery as there were alcoholics who had recovered. . . . The \$15,000 from the sale of stock to other members was to pay the expenses of the Newark office, which included Ruth Hock's salary, and to support Hank and Bill while they worked on the project. The fellowship at large was to profit from the enterprise through the payment of author's royalties to the Alcoholic Foundation. No one seems to have seen clearly the implications of this scheme, including, from the evidence, Hank and Bill themselves. Surely, the two of them did not have the right to assume ownership and control of what would be the fellowship's only tangible asset" (114–19).



20. Bill W., *The Language of the Heart: Bill W.'s Grapevine Writings* (New York: The AA Grapevine, Inc., 1988), 145. In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, Bill Wilson also writes that "A.A.'s first national development of consequence came in 1939. In September that year, Fulton Oursler, then editor of *Liberty* magazine published a piece called 'Alcoholics and God,' written by Morris Markey. About 800 frantic inquiries descended upon us immediately and we wrote to them all" (87).
21. For the full article, including the introductory title language quoted above, see "Alcoholics and God," <http://silkworth.net/aahistory/alcsandgod.html> (accessed 10/11/08).
22. *Lois Remembers*, 116.
23. Francis Hartigan, *Bill W.: A Biography of Alcoholics Anonymous Cofounder Bill Wilson* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001), 127–28.
24. Percy Hutchison, "Alcoholic Experience," review of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *New York Times*, June 25, 1939.
25. W. D. Silkworth, "A New Approach to Psychotherapy in Chronic Alcoholism," in *Journal-Lancet*, vol. 46, July 1939, <http://silkworth.net/silkworth/newapproach.html> (accessed 10/11/08).
26. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 322.
27. See *Getting Better Inside Alcoholics Anonymous* by Nan Robertson (New York: Fawcett-Crest, 1988), 59. See also *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* by Ernest Kurtz (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1979), 92n.
28. Kurtz, *Not-God*, 92n.
29. This review and twenty-four others are available at <http://silkworth.net/bbreviews/01011.html> (accessed 10/11/08).
30. Statement made during a June 6, 1979, visit to the AA General Service Board in New York, where the two millionth copy was presented (See *Alcoholism Report*, June 8, 1979).
31. "The Unbeliever" was dropped beginning with the first printing of the second edition.
32. "I am Responsible': Over 44,000 A.A.s Celebrate Sobriety," *Box 459: News and Notes from the General Service Office of A.A.* 51, no. 4 (August–September 2005): 2. Available at www.aa.org/en_pdfs/en_box459_aug-sept05.pdf (accessed 10/11/08).
33. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., 132.
34. *Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous (ADGSCAA) 1951–2004* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1978–2004), 60.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Telephone interview between Charles Bishop Jr. and John G., January 2005.
37. See, for example, the extended discussion of "Conference-approved literature" at www.hindsfoot.org/archives.html (accessed 10/11/08).
38. For further comment on this subject, see "Spirituality versus Legalism in Alcoholics Anonymous" by Charles Bishop Jr., which investigates legal issues and lawsuits over copyrights and trademarks alleged in conflict with AA traditions, and is available at <http://silkworth.net/charliebjr/index.html> (accessed 10/11/08).
39. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, mentioned by title near the end of chapter 2 in all four editions of the Big Book, is cited in order to emphasize that AA does not endorse a particular religion.
40. Dick B., *Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7th ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, 1998).
41. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 1st ed., 100. (Also *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., 87.)
42. Lois W., "In AA's First Five Years," *AA Grapevine*, January 1967. Available at www.midlandaa.org/history/first5years.pdf (accessed 10/28/08).



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(Continued from front flap)

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“[Arriving at the printing plant,] we brought with us the mangled but precious printer’s copy of Alcoholics Anonymous. When the Cornwall manager saw the mess our book was in he was so dismayed that he almost sent us home to make a fresh typing of the whole business.”

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