

# Atlanta AA 1941 - 1974

\*Including the Establishment of NABA

In June 1941, an army officer, Steve Morris, came to Atlanta from Washington, D.C. He had recently obtained sobriety. Being an alcoholic, he realized that he was going to have to find other alcoholics to help if he was going to preserve his own new-found sobriety. He inserted the following classified ad in one of the local newspapers:

If anyone has a drinking problem and wants to do something about it, write P.O. Box 1215. (Incidentally, this is the same Post Office Box that AA has to this day).

A former minister Sam Daughtry, an alcoholic, answered this ad. Then, he went to the post office the next day to see who picked up the mail from this particular box. After seeing Steve, the army officer open the box, Sam accosted the officer and told him that he was the one who answered the ad.

Each of them knew another alcoholic who they thought might be interested and each went his way to collect the other alcoholic. The four then got together at the officer's apartment in Buckhead. There was the army officer, the former minister, a real estate man, and a dentist. They held their first meeting in the basement of the army officer's home in Buckhead sitting on still-unopened packing boxes containing his household goods.

Soon after this a few more problem drinkers were taken into the fold and meetings were held at the Robert Fulton Hotel. Newspapers recorded that event and the began to reach problem drinkers.

Those who had an honest desire to stop drinking came in with hope and enthusiasm. They made an unconditional surrender to the program and began helping each other's and maintaining their own sobriety so they could go out and start helping others.

Some came in under pressure from their wives and employers. Some were resentful. Some were curiosity seekers. Some found sobriety through surrender. Others lost it through rebellion. Faithful members continued to stay on the beam.

In 1942 AA [*Alcoholics Anonymous*] was beginning to grow. The small meeting room at the Robert Fulton Hotel was no longer adequate. We obtained a meeting place and club room at 57 1/2 Broad Street. We had ample room to accommodate the members, their families and friends. Closed meetings were held on Tuesdays and open meetings on Fridays. The clubroom was open 7 days a week. In addition to meetings, there were various entertainments and social affairs. We began to receive public recognition through the generosity of four well-known newspaper columnists: Morgan Blake, Dean DeOvies, Pierce Harris and Ernest Rogers.

Gradually the stigma of alcoholism gave way to a better understanding of alcoholism as a disease. Since alcoholism is no respecter of persons, women problem drinkers became affiliated with us and in turn began carrying the message to other women. With this cooperation and mutual understanding we were enabled to reach out a helping hand to those who had lost he way.

In 1946 the owners of the building notified us with regrets, that they were going to remodel the building on Broad Street so once again AA was on the move.

We held meetings for several months at the YMCA. We then leased a building on Houston Street. We were just getting accustomed to the place when the building was destroyed by fire.

The homeless AAs then returned to the YMCA where we continued to hold meetings and to hope and pray for another clubroom where we could once again feel at home.

In 1946, through the cooperation of our members, we were enabled to rent a spacious meeting hall and clubroom at the corner of North Avenue and String Street, and became known as the North Avenue Group. Although we were centrally located, the environment did not contribute a great deal towards quietness and serenity. North Avenue being a public highway, we were continually disturbed by the perpetual backfiring of trucks, the sirens of fire engines, and ambulances and other noises while directly beneath us the customers were whooping it up in the beer parlor. In spite of this, we survived and began taking things in stride. Membership grew rapidly. We began taking on new life and enthusiasm.

A newspaperman, recognizing the great work we were doing, decided to do something about getting a permanent meeting place for AA. He offered to head a committee to solicit funds to purchase a new home for us so we could expand and be in position to help a greater number of people from all walks of life. He wrote an article, published in the Atlanta Journal, informing us, as well as the public, of this new project.

The seventh tradition, in brief, is that every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. In those days, the AA traditions were something we only read about. We were unable to grasp the full significance of the twelve tradition as being supplemental to the twelve steps as a safeguard to our great fellowship. There were mixed feelings of enthusiasm and resentment as a result of this offer of outside help. Some of us had visions of the finest AA home in the Southeast. Others felt the outside financial help would take away from our primary purpose of carrying the message to other alcoholics. The entire membership got together and held a business meeting to discuss this controversial subject, and to vote on it. The pros and cons led to a verbal battle royal and tempers reached a boiling point. It was decided by a substantial majority to accept this outside offer of financial help.

The leader of the opposition got in touch with the newspaperman and demanded that he withdraw this offer or the group would be split wide open. The offer was eventually withdrawn, but the damage was already done and the group was split wide open. A small group of the members immediately withdrew and formed a new group known as the Central Group. The first meeting was held in the Women's Club at Little Five Points. Later it was moved to the Kimball House. They were on top of the world with enthusiasm as they anticipated great things for the future. While they functioned as a normal AA group they were not taking in any new members. Then some of the older members began losing interest and attendance began dropping off. Dissention sprang up within the group. They didn't realize it at the time but when they left the North Avenue Group they took with them the greatest enemy of alcoholics – wholesale resentments against the remaining group. Gradually they began returning to the original group. Some were lost on the way and never came back. Some of the insurgents returned to the North Avenue Group and began working on the tenth step “continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

In 1946 a corporation was chartered under the laws of the State of Georgia, the official name being Atalan Society, Inc. Since Alcoholics Anonymous is primarily a spiritual organization it cannot legally incur expenses, pay bills, sign agreements or otherwise handle anything material. It has to have a business agent. The Atalan Society was founded to act as the fiscal agent of Alcoholics Anonymous for the Atlanta area, to act as custodian and disbursing agent of AA funds, to provide facilities for carrying on all AA activities, to raise, receive and disburse funds

and to do and perform any and all other things and acts necessary to carry on all the corporate purposes. Funds were raised by voluntary contribution of members ranging from \$1 to \$10 per month.

In the meantime, we were forced to move from our North Avenue location due to remodeling of the building. So, we were again without a home and we held meetings in the Chamber of Commerce Auditorium for several months.

In October 1947, we moved to a higher altitude. We leased the entire third floor of a building on Hunter Street between Whitehall and Pryor. There were two steep flights of steps to climb. Although we were supposed to be sick people we succeeded in negotiating these steps from day to day without casualty. There was a lot of hard work to be done before the clubroom could be occupied. Our physically stronger members pitched in with saws, hammers, ladders, paint brushes, sanding machines, and other equipment. Those who were too weak physically pitched in financially. At the end of 30 days we moved into our freshly painted and renovated clubroom.

In 1947 the West End Neighborhood Group was formed.

In 1948 some of the wives of members became interested in the program and formed a Women's Auxiliary known as the NAA – Non-Alcoholics Anonymous. It was felt they needed a program of their own so they could better understand the Alcoholic in order to help him as well as to offer mutual help and understanding to each other and to guide the wives of the newer members. From the very beginning this movement proved successful. Meetings were held at the homes of some of the wives on Tuesday nights while we were holding our closed meetings at the clubroom. After our own meeting, we would meet our wives for refreshment and fellowship followed by a gabfest. We always looked forward to this. The name was later changed to the national known Al-Anon.

Late in 1949, we began experiencing another growing spurt. More and more men and women were climbing those two flights of steps seeking a new way of life. The building on Hunter Street became top heavy and we felt was no longer safe. After much maneuvering and hard work, we succeeded in leasing the second floor of a building at 522 West Peachtree Street. Quite a few of our members pitched in with saw, hammers, brooms, wheelbarrows, paint brushes and other necessary tools. Although the remodeling of the Hunter Street building had proved to be a tremendous task, the repairing, remodeling, and renovating of the 522 clubroom and meeting hall proved to be an even greater task. It required more money, more work and more planning to accomplish our mission. Members unselfishly gave of their time, talent and financial support to secure the success of this venture. After 30 days of steady work we moved up another notch.

The clubroom, meeting hall and lounge at 522 West Peachtree proved to be the finest, largest and most convenient AA quarters we were ever privileged to assemble in. The 522 Club was divided into three compartments, the largest being the auditorium where we held our meetings. This had a seating capacity of 400. The clubroom was nicely arranged with new furniture, a kitchen and snack bar, where regular meals were served. A partition separated the kitchen from the lounge which was comfortably furnished. The lounge included the secretary's office. The Reverend Sam D., one of our charter members, who was then the pastor of a church in Bristol, Tennessee, accepted an invitation to be our first guest speaker. Sam delivered a masterful AA message that inspired a capacity audience and set the pace for many other good talks during our stay at 522.

In 1948 the Little Five Points Group made its appearance and began flourishing. The name was later change to the Druid Hills Group and still later to the Northeast Group, and is still operating.

In 1949 the Buckhead Group was formed, meeting first in the homes of some of the members. Later they acquired the use of the Garden Hills Community Club on Rumsen Road. This proved to be a thriving and fast-growing group and contributed to the formation of 3 other groups: the Skyland, Ansley Park and Sandy Springs groups.

The 24-Hour Group was organized in 1951.

The 1951 Atlanta was host of the Southeastern Convention held at the Biltmore Hotel. This proved to be the most successful and inspiring convention ever held in the Southeast. In addition to many outstanding speakers, Bill W., our co-founder, came to us from New York and spoke at every session. It was our good fortune to become personally acquainted with him, to hear him, to understand him and to be inspired by his message. This convention went from both a spiritual and financial standpoint. A surplus of \$500 was sent to the then Foundation in New York.

In 1952 the Brookwood Group was started, meeting in the Peachtree Christian Church.

Due to remodeling plans in 1953, we were again forced to move. With the advent of the neighborhood groups and the lower attendance and financial support at the 522 Club we were required to move to smaller quarters – this time the second floor of a building on Walton Street, and our first central office was set up on Luckie Street.

The primary purpose of the Central Office was to handle and channel 12 step work for all groups in the Atlanta area, provide speakers and programs for the AA groups, at the Federal Penitentiary as well as to find sponsors for them, to correspond with institutional groups, and serve as a clearing house for contacts with General Services, to serve as headquarters for the Atlanta Area, to provide volunteers to carry on public relations activities with churches, schools, etc., to provide meeting places for city-wide AA meetings, which are held periodically and attended by all AA groups. The expenses of the Central Office are met by contribution from all AA groups in the Atlanta Area supplemented by pledges from individual members.

The Inter-Committee is composed of one representative from each group. These representatives are elected or appointed from the individual groups. Officers are elected by the Inter-Group. They serve for one year. Meetings are held each month, business matters of vital interest to AA are discussed and acted upon. This in turn s relayed to each group by its representative.

The Easy Does It group was formed in 1955. In early 1956 the Trinity Group was formed and the Hapeville Group began in November of the same year. Also in 1955 the Tri-Cities group started.

In August 1956 Atlanta was host to the Georgia State Convention held at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel. Many outstanding speakers came to us with the message of AA. We had 3 days of fellowship and inspiration. Many of us worked hard arranging these meetings and were rewarded with another successful convention, both from a spiritual and financial viewpoint. A surplus of \$250 was contributed to the General Service Headquarters.

In early 1957 the Decatur Group was founded, followed in May by the Sandy Springs Group. [Note: not sure if this is a different group from the Sandy Springs group formed in 1949

*above.*] From the groups in existence at this time, other groups sprang up until today there are over 75 groups in the Atlanta area.

In 1958 our first annual banquet was held, and has been held annually each June, and at this time AA's from all the groups come for a fine meal and fellowship and a regular get-together.

In 1963 the Georgia State Convention was again held in Atlanta.

In 1967 the Southeastern Convention and the State Convention were combined and met at the Biltmore Hotel for another excellent convention.

The State Convention was again held in 1971 at the Biltmore Hotel with much success.

### **ATLANTA CLUBS**

On December 20, 1957, the Northside Alcoholic Benevolent Association was incorporated under the laws of the State of Georgia. It was felt that Atlanta was lagging far behind other metropolitan areas and that a modern and up-to-date clubhouse on the Northside would contribute a great deal to the progress of AA in the Atlanta Area. A Board of Directors was elected and Committees appointed to select a desirable location. A modern home on Peachtree Road was decided upon. It was conveniently located at 2521 Peachtree Road NE. The Club was dedicated on Sunday, March 16, 1958 with Dean DeOvies, a [local newspaper columnist and] friend of AA for many years, being the principal speaker. He paid a timely tribute to AA stating that he had watched the progress of AA over the years and that he was proud of the new clubhouse and that it was a credit to the City of Atlanta. After moving to a new location further up Peachtree Road, NABA was finally able, in 1965, to move into their own building at 1809 Briarwood Road. Here NABA has a clubhouse, and meeting rooms that will compare with any in the United States. At the present time, it is under an expansion program which will make it even finer.

In June 1968, the Biscayne Room was opened. It has steadily grown in membership since that time. Biscayne is open seven days a week and may sick alcoholics have been treated there.

Also, listed as clubs in the Atlanta Area are Triangle Club, July, 1966; Dogwood Club, April, 1965; Rebus Club in Smyrna, February, 1969; DeKalb Room, April, 1971; and the Tara Club, March, 1972. These clubs operate on a limited basis.

**Amen**

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