A Brief History of A.A. in Delaware County in Indiana

Appeal to the Great Spirit
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What Is Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The following is a brief account of the beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous in Delaware County, Indiana. This information is a collection of newspaper clippings, periodicals, and reports of the group progression in East-Central Indiana.

The Saturday Evening Post, March 1, 1941 issue an article titled: Alcoholics Anonymous Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others, By Jack Alexander. This article states the beginnings of AA’s activities and growth. Two Indiana cities Evansville and Indianapolis are mentioned as locations of active groups in the United States. Evansville was started in April 1940, and Indianapolis October 1940.

The Muncie Newspapers report on Alcoholics Anonymous in Indianapolis, IN., in a front page column titled: The Day In Indiana, By Maurice Early, Alcoholics Anonymous, Membership Grows, Proud Of Cures, Talk Same Language, Half Stay On Wagon. This article is dated: Tuesday, July 29, 1941. Reprinted, on the next page.
The Day
In Indiana
BY MAURICE EARLY

Alcoholics Anonymous.
Membership Grows.
Proud Of Cures.
Talk Same Language.
Half Stay On Wagon.

Indianapolis, July 28.

MANY Hoosiers now on the
road to seeing pink elephants
soon will be members of a flour-
ishing informal organization
which styles itself Alcoholics An-
onymous. Only one tie binds
the men and women in this fel-
lowship. It is their common ex-
perience of having traveled
through the alcohol route.

TWO HUNDRED eleven days
ago—an New Year's eve—five
Indianapolis men who had cured
themselves through accepting
the Alcoholics Anonymous phi-
losophy were given their first
and only press publicity in a fea-
ture story in the Indianapolis
Star.

TODAY THEY have forty
members in the group which
holds weekly Sunday Breakfasts
at a north side hotel. In Octo-
ber one of the founders of the
A. A. from Akron, O., will be the
speaker at a dinner meeting of
the fellowship. Experiences of
other cities, where the A. A. got
started sooner, demonstrate
there will be many groups
formed in Indianapolis and
other Indiana cities. Cleveland,
O., now has sixteen groups with
a membership of nearly 1,000.

MUNCIE, INDIANA, TUESDAY, JULY 29, 1941.

THERE IS ANOTHER reason
why the enthusiasts can predict
a spread of the fellowship. They
claim the "woods is full" of peo-
ple who have reached the stage
where drinking is an illness.
There is not much hope for the
bums who fall in the gutter.
Rather it is the "nice" people—
especially minor executives—who
are more likely to see the light
and profit by the A. A.

IT IS BELIEVED that the
strength of the movement, and
its success, comes from the fact
that it is not a reform organiza-
tion. It has no concern about
prohibition, liquor regulatory
laws, whether or not people
drink, nor is it affiliated with
any religion.

EACH MEMBER is concerned
primarily with his own rescue
and in payment for it is willing
to assist some other drunk who
wants help.

Long faces or pious attitudes
naturally do not exist among
those boys who would prefer to
be on the list of those who can
drink with restraint. One leader
interviewed for this column ex-
tended an invitation to attend a
group breakfast and meant it
when he said "you don't have to
come dry or we will get you a
drink if you want it."

THERE IS NOTHING altruistic
or secretive about the A. A. It
accepts the medical view that an
acute alcoholism is sick. Therefore
there is no reason to give pub-
licity to those who have over-
come the illness.

BUT IN PRACTICE members
of the A. A. like to talk about it.
While they do not tell the names
of other members they have a
feeling of pride in their accom-
plishment.

TO GET LINED up with the
A. A. just drop a letter to the
post office box 1474, Indian-
apolis, and one of the fellowship
—usually busy business people
—will take time out to see you.
Cures simmer down to a fellow
being honest with himself.

PREREQUISITES for mem-
bership, it is explained, are these:
that the alcoholic knows that
he is sick, that he admits it to
someone else, and that he wants
to get well. There is no such
thing as a pledge. Neither can
one get in the fold simply to
satisfy the nagging of a relative.

ABOUT HALF of those who
affiliate stay on the wagon.
Some of the younger ones, it is
found, are more optimistic
about their chances of beating
the game and relapse. But they
can come back after they have
"slipped." There is no preaching.

ONE OF THE ODD things dis-
covered is that an alcoholic is
not likely to heed advice of a
person who is not a drinker. He
is cold to sound reasoning of a
doctor, a temperance advocate,
or a well-meaning wife or
mother. But when he gets with
another drunk or, as in the case
of the A. A., a known ex-drunk,
his absolute confidence in
his words. They talk the same
language on a practical basis.

ONE OF THE more important
aides to staying on the wagon,
an A. A. member says, is work-
ing to help others.

NO DUES are collected. At
breakfast there is a "kitty" to
which contributions of not to
exceed 25 cents may be made.
This is used to support the New
York office, which is a central
clearing house. It also prints
literature which is given pros-
pects and placed in libraries.
The Alcoholic Foundation, National Headquarters in New York City listed Muncie, Indiana as having a lone member contact in its 1944 Group Directory. Someone sent an April 10, 1945 article from the Muncie Newspaper to the Alcoholic Foundation, P. O. Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, New York. This article is in the news clippings collection in the Archives at New York. This article is mentioned in the June 1945 issue of the Grapevine. The AA Grapevine is the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous.

April 10, 1945, Muncie Star

INDIANA’S NEWEST venture. In drunk cure activity appears to be headed for success. The newly instituted Indiana Home, owned and operated by two members of the Alcoholics Anonymous group, had six customers during its first week of operation. The North Alabama street institution, has an eighteen-bed capacity.

WHILE THIS institution is a private venture to give drunks a six day treatment to sober them up, it is serving another purpose. It is to be a “focal point” for the members of the alcoholic anonymous group, which has grown to more than 150 in less than five years. AA members, all former drunks, will visit the patients while they are being relieved of the jitters in the hope of interesting them in the philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous.

INDIANA HOME is not patterned after a similar institution at Columbus, O., and seven homes in Cleveland. This specialized nursing home has an advantage over a regular hospital. It can be visited at all times by AA members. This would not be possible in a general hospital.

The Grapevine article may have been sent from Muncie or this article may have suggested that the Indiana Home was in Muncie, IN. The Indiana Home was actually in Indianapolis, IN.
It was 1945. Though substance abuse was as old as alcohol itself, treatment centers were unheard of, at least in Indiana. Dr. Robert N., Mr. William B., and others saw the devastating effects that alcoholism had on good men, and decided to do something about it.

The Indiana Home

"It was into this scenario that the seeds of the present day Fairbanks Hospital were planted. These men's work formed the Indiana Home, a 12-bed men's detoxification unit. The program began in a house in downtown Indianapolis, 1341 North Alabama Street, and moved several places before finally settling at 2054 North Delaware St., Indianapolis, Indiana. A community-wide fundraising effort worked toward a new, larger facility in the late 1960's, that could provide services for men and women. A $250,000 grant from the Cornelia Cole Fairbanks Trust Fund, along with many other donations large and small, gave birth to the new Fairbanks Hospital at 1575 Northwestern Ave. in May of 1970. By 1982, Fairbanks opened its doors to a new 96 bed facility, at its present location, 8102 Clearvista Parkway, Indianapolis.” (Fairbanks Archives)

In the June 1946 Grapevine, Union City was listed under the “New Groups” column. This was done between, April 10 and May 10, 1946, by John C. B. of Union City, Indiana.

Between July 9 and September 9, 1946 Muncie and Dunkirk, IN. groups were listed by J. R. H., in Dunkirk, Indiana.

In 1946, Muncie has two groups: The “Muncie Mission Group” and The Muncie Group, with a Post Office Box: 741, for contact information.

The following would appear in the Special Notices column of the Muncie Newspapers:

DO YOU want to stop drinking?

Contact Alcoholics Anonymous,

P.O. Box 741, Muncie, Ind.
The following letter was found in the Archives (NY) files and was written by the early members of Muncie & Inter-County Group in 1955.

MUNCIE & INTER-COUNTY GROUP

The above group was started in September 1946 by Jack B., Union City, Indiana and Bob H. of Dunkirk, Indiana. These two having been introduced to AA in other cities, were brought together through the efforts of the New York Office. It was decided to start the group in Muncie, in as much as the larger metropolitan area seemed to offer better opportunities for growth. The first few members, however, all came from the outlying communities near Muncie and the name of the group was therefore selected to suggest this.

Mrs. Chloe T., of the Muncie Mission, was extremely helpful at the organization of the group. Our first meeting place was in the Muncie Mission, where we tried to be of help to the transients, and also the permanent residents of this mission.

The earliest members came from Hartford City, Winchester, and New Castle, Indiana, and it was some months before the movement started to make itself felt (felt) in Muncie proper.

After about a year in the Muncie Mission, it was felt that the nature of our meeting place had a tendency to discourage attendance of Muncie people, and accordingly we moved to the YMCA. In this location members from Muncie finally started to attending, as well as people from Yorktown, Montpelier, and Dunkirk. After about one year at the YMCA location, the meeting hall became inadequate, and clubrooms were secured. This later proved to be unsatisfactory, and another move took us to the present location. The membership now varies from about 50 to a low of 25. It is about evenly divided between Muncie people, and those from outlying communities.

In 1949 there were about 8 persons from New Castle attending meetings in Muncie, and they decided to start their own group, which has grown to a very prosperous group in that city.

Some of the early members were Joe L., Muncie, Jim R., Yorktown, Don S. and Joe S., Hartford City, Arthur H. of Dunkirk, and Eldridge H. and Dorothy D. of Muncie.

A check of the files shows that approximately 200 people have attended our meetings at different times, and we feel that about 80% of these have attained sobriety, although they have stopped attendance at meetings.

One unfortunate aspect of the movement in the city of Muncie is the fact that there has always been a very poor spirit of co-operation between the newspapers and other aspects of the community, and the AA group here. This is exceptional, we feel, and has somewhat handicapped our growth.
From the Archives and Special Collections in the Ball State University Library:


Report Some Mission Diners Pay for Meals

During the month of July, 1,004 meals were served at the Muncie Mission, Chloe Thomas, superintendent, said yesterday. Of these, 105 were free, 450 were worked for, and 449 were paid.

On July 17, the Mission began the practice of serving meals to residents who can pay, according to Mrs. Thomas. “We hope to have enough income from this source to pay for all food, including those meals which are given away,” she said. Meals are still provided to those who cannot pay and are eligible.

During July four meetings of a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous were held at the Mission and one joint meeting with another Muncie Chapter. “Much good is being accomplished by the educational program of this national organization, and the willingness of its members to help others personally,” Chloe J. Thomas, superintendent comments.

Alcoholics Anonymous

A chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous had four meetings at the Mission and one joint meeting with another Muncie chapter. Speakers came from Union City and Dayton.

Older residents of the Mission made their annual visit to the Delaware County Fair as guests of Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Norrick. Bus transportation to and from the grounds was a gift of J. L. Mills. 4-H Club girls sent cakes to the Mission from the fair after prizes had been awarded.
Mission Houses
63 Men Nightly
During September

An average of sixty-three men were housed each night during the month of September in the building owned by the Eddie Thomas Memorial Mission and in the larger one, which is leased, according to Chloe J. Thomas, superintendent.

Approximately forty-five residents are permanent, and of those twenty-seven receive old-age assistance, or other federal aid. Other residents are from the group whose occupation changes with the seasons, or changes geographically, causing them to have to move about. All are fed who need to be, and those who can pay are being served also. This income from meals goes toward paying for the entire feeding program.

A few of those who live at the Mission are alcoholics. There were four meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous during the month. Guests from chapters in five Indiana cities and from one Ohio chapter have been in attendance.

FOOD GIFTS CUT
COST OF MEALS

Mission Aided by Donations
From Many Persons.
The Muncie Star. Tuesday Dec. 17, 1946:

Alcoholics Anonymous Will Meet at Y.W.C.A.

The Muncie and Inter-County Group of Alcoholics Anonymous will hold an “information meeting” at the Y.W.C.A. January 3 to which ministers, priests and physicians will be invited. This meeting will be addressed by three speakers experienced in the A.A. movement, including a doctor and a minister.

In this same day’s newspaper (Dec. 17, 1946) the following advertisement appears:

ALCOHOLISM

If you cannot control your drinking and do not understand why, contact us, personally or by phone, immediately. Information without obligation. Our Service for Men Only.

THE RETREAT
41 W. 32d St.  TA 3021
Indianapolis
Hold Information Meeting -- The Muncie, Ind., Mission Group has changed its name to the Muncie and Inter-County Group, although still meeting weekly at the Muncie Mission until a larger room can be found. Workers report a great need for A.A. work in Muncie and an attempt to meet a lack of information led to a meeting last month at the YWCA in Muncie with speakers from Dayton and Indianapolis, including a minister, priest, physician and an A.A. member. About 300 invitations were sent to clergymen, doctors, judges and others and about 250 copies of Medicine Looks at A.A. and the A.A. booklet were obtained for the meeting, which is expected to result in better contacts for 12th Step work.
Muncie has always had it’s share of controversy and from it good has often prevailed.

This article from the Muncie Evening Press daily column, titled:


This upset some of the local members and prompted a response in a Letter To The Editor. Muncie Evening Press, February 5, 1947. (Next Page)
Voice of Eastern Indiana

PROGRAM OF THE A. A.

To The Editor:

A few days ago there appeared an article "In the Press of Things", the heading of which was "The Other Fellow", who was a drunk.

There would not have been much thought about the article by a FEW of us had it not been that the so-called drunk was reported to have boasted that he belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. These few, perhaps unthoughtlessly placed words, caused an already difficult situation to become worse for us—a small group of men and women who are trying to stay sober and to help others to stay sober.

The article, to say the least, places a odious stigma on Alcoholics Anonymous and an unfair implication on its members. The person referred to in the article is well known to us and undoubtedly was drunk, but to brand Alcoholics Anonymous because one person was drunk is like labeling all churches hypocritical because we believe some members are hypocrites. It is true sometimes that the ones who criticize the church or its members as being hypocrites are themselves hypocritical and criticize for the sole purpose of covering up their own shortcomings. Of course, there could be no simile between this situation and one person calling another a "drunk."

We who are trying would appreciate very much your telling the people of this community that there are none who sincerely live the Alcoholics Anonymous program that are gutter snipes or drunks. As in any group of society, there are misfits who do not live by the accepted rules, but you do not crucify society because of them.

You might mention also the fact that there are well over 1,000 non-dues paying groups of Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States, Canada, South and Central America with an aggregate membership in excess of 35,000 and that the length of sobriety of the members of these groups range from a few months up to 12 years. (The A. A. movement was started in 1935). You might say too that since alcoholism has no favorites, hitting the poor and rich alike, that we have both in our group and both are welcome. There are only two requirements for A. A. participants. First, an admission that we cannot handle liquor, that it controls us and second, that we sincerely (note the word sincerely) want to do something about it. To any who can answer truthfully "yes" to these two requirements, we extend a most cordial invitation to help us and let us help them.

The A. A. program is not one of prohibition. It will not as an organization enter into any controversial subject, either religious, political, or social. Our only purpose is to help each other keep sober and while a few of us do slip, by far the majority of us are leading sober and I might add extremely happy lives.

Alcoholism is now recognized by the medical profession generally as a disease and as such, there is no disgrace attached to it; any more so than there is to any other disease such as diabetes or tuberculosis. Also there is no moral issue involved. The true alcoholic person is allergic to alcohol and however much he would like to be a social drinker, he simply cannot take any amount of alcohol without running the risk of the bad effects which every alcoholic person thoroughly knows. He cannot do this any more than a hay fever sufferer can walk through a field of golden rod without the bad effects of sneezing.

If you publish this letter please tell your readers that they can reach Alcoholics Anonymous through P. O. Box 741 and tell them also that they must demonstrate their sincerity by letting us know how we may contact them personally.

An Alcoholic Anonymous Member.
The Old-Timers of the Muncie Groups have passed on this the story of AA’s beginnings around 1945 or 1946 as:

“A man from Dayton (some say Cincinnati), Ohio met with Bob H. at Heekin Park, in a car (automobile) in Muncie, Indiana around the fall of the year. Bob H. stayed sober for 27 years before passing away in 1973.”
The 1947 Indiana Meeting list in the Indianapolis Archives listed two groups in Muncie: 
**Muncie Group #1**, meeting in a home, on Tuesday, at 8:00 P.M., and the 
**Muncie & Tri-County Group #2**, which met at the Mission, on Wednesday at 7:30 P.M., 603 South Mulberry Street, Muncie, Indiana

By late 1947, the Muncie & Inter-County Group outgrew the Muncie Mission (below left) and moved to the Y.M.C.A. (below right)

By 1949, the two Muncie groups became one group named “Muncie & Inter-County Group.” The New Castle continent began a group in New Castle, Indiana, which was scheduled to meet on Thursdays.

The 1950’s found the groups in Anderson, Dunkirk, Marion, Richmond and New Castle, meeting on various days of the week.

In 1954, “The State Line Group” in Union City, Indiana and the Cambridge City meetings begin. Both are still meeting to this day.

The 1960 directory listed the days and locations for the groups.

Muncie's “Inter-County Group” met on Mondays at the Wilson's Restaurant, located at, 2525 North Broadway, Muncie, Indiana.

The Friday Night Group” met at the Labor Center, 1125 South Walnut Street. This signaled the beginning of group growth in Muncie.

After its beginning in Muncie, A.A. grew slowly, but a period of rapid growth begins in the 1970’s to the present. Muncie has over 40 meetings listed each week.

For more information, they can be reached by:

Mail: P.O. Box 2072, Muncie, IN. 47302
Telephone: (765) 284 – 2515
Web Site: http://www.aamuncie.org

Dated March 27, 2008.