

The history of the Twelve Traditions constructed from the following sources

12&12	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
AACOA	AA Comes of Age
BW-FH	Bill W by Francis Hartigan
BW-RT	Bill W by Robert Thompson
DBGO	Dr Bob and the Good Oldtimers
GSC	General Service Conference (final report identified by year of issue)
GTBT	Grateful to Have Been There by Nell Wing
Gv	Grapevine (identified by year and month of issue)
LOH	The Language of the Heart
LR	Lois Remembers
PIO	Pass It On
SM	AA Service Manual and Twelve Concepts for World Service

1937: On the AA calendar of “year two,” the spirit of Tradition Three emerged. A member asked to be admitted who frankly described himself to the “oldest” member as “the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism.” The “addiction” was “sex deviate.” (See note *) Guidance came from Dr Bob (the oldest member in Akron, OH) asking, “What would the Master do?” The member was admitted and plunged into 12th Step work. (DBGO 240-241 12&12 141-142) Note: this story is often erroneously intermingled with an incident that occurred eight years later in 1945 at the 41st St clubhouse in NYC. (PIO 318). (Note *) From an audiotape of Bill W at an open meeting of the 1968 GSC. See also the pamphlet *The Co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous*. (P-53, pg 30)

1939: The Foreword to the 1st edition Big Book defined basic principles that would later evolve into the Twelve Traditions. An extract:

It is important that we remain anonymous ... We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation. ... When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name 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 or 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 should like to be helpful to such cases. Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed.

1942: Correspondence from groups gave early signals of a need to develop guidelines to help with group problems that occurred repeatedly. Basic ideas for the Twelve Traditions emerged from this correspondence and the principles defined in the Foreword to the 1st Ed. Big Book. (AACOA 187, 192-193, 198, 204, PIO 305-306, LOH 154)

1942: Oct, Clarence S stirred up a controversy in Cleveland after discovering that Dr Bob and Bill W were receiving royalties from Big Book sales. (DBGO 267-269, BW-FH 153-154, AACOA 193-194) Bill and Dr Bob re-examined the problem of their financial status and concluded that royalties from the Big Book seemed to be the only answer to the problem. Bill sought counsel from Father Ed Dowling who suggested that Bill and Bob could not accept money for 12th Step work, but should accept royalties as compensation for special services. This later formed the basis for Tradition 8. (AACOA 194-195, PIO 322-324)

1945: Apr, Earl T, pioneer member and founder of AA in Chicago (whose Big Book story is *He Sold Himself Short*), suggested that Bill codify the Traditions and write essays on them for the Gv. Initially, the Twelve Traditions were qualified as *Twelve Points to Assure Our Future*. (AACOA 22, 203, GTBT 54-55, 77, SM S8, PIO 306, LOH 20-24)

1945: Aug, the Gv carried Bill's first Traditions article (titled *Modesty One Plank for Good Public Relations*) setting the ground work for his campaign for the Traditions. The July Gv had an article by member C.H.K. of Lansing, MI about the Washingtonians. Bill used this article to begin his essay commentaries.

1945: The Alcoholic Foundation wrote to John D Rockefeller, Jr. and the 1940 dinner guests that AA no longer needed their financial help. Big Book royalties could look after Dr Bob and Bill W and Group contributions could pay the general office expenses. This ended all “outside contributions” to AA. From 1945 on AA has declined all outside contributions and this principle formed the basis for Tradition 7. (AACOA 203-204)

1945: Bill W was called by Barry L (who would later author *Living Sober*) from the 41st St clubhouse. Bill persuaded the group to take in a black man who was an ex-convict with bleach-blond hair, wearing women’s clothing and makeup. The man also admitted to being a “dope fiend.” When asked what to do about it, Bill posed the question, “did you say he was a drunk?” When answered, “yes” Bill replied, “well I think that’s all we can ask.” The man was reported to have disappeared shortly after. (BW-FH 8, PIO 317-318) Anecdotal accounts erroneously say that this individual went on to become one of the best 12th Steppers in NY. This story is often erroneously intermingled with that of a 1937 incident (“year two” on the AA calendar) involving an Akron member that is discussed in the Tradition Three essay in the 12&12 (pgs 141-142).

1946: Apr, the Gv carried the article *Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition*. These would later be called the long form of the Traditions. (AACOA viii, 96, 203, LOH 20, 154, Gv)

1947: Jun, the AA *Preamble* first appeared in the Gv. It was based on the Foreword to the 1st edition Big Book and written by Tom Y, the Gv’s first editor.

1947: Aug, in his Gv Traditions essay titled *Last Seven Years Have Made AA Self-Supporting*, Bill wrote “Two years ago the trustees set aside, out of AA book funds, a sum which enabled my wife and me to pay off the mortgage on our home and make some needed improvements. The Foundation also granted Dr. Bob and me each a royalty of 10% on the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, our only income from AA sources. We are both very comfortable and deeply grateful.”

1947: Dec, the Gv carried a notice that an important new 48 page pamphlet *AA Traditions* was sent to each group and that enough copies were available for each member to have one free of charge.

1949: As plans for the 1st Int’l Convention were under way, Earl T suggested to Bill that the *Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition* would benefit from revision and shortening. (AACOA says 1947). Bill, with Earl’s help, set out to develop the short form of the Traditions. (AACOA 213, GTBT 55, 77, PIO 334)

1949: Nov, the short form of the Twelve Traditions was first printed in the Gv. The entire issue was dedicated to the Traditions in preparation for the forthcoming Cleveland Convention. Two wording changes were subsequently made to the initial version: “primary spiritual aim” was changed to “primary purpose” in Tradition Six, and “principles above personalities” was changed to “principles before personalities” in Tradition Twelve. (LOH 96)

1950: Jul, AA’s 15th anniversary and 1st Int’l Convention at Cleveland, OH (est. 3,000 attendees). Registration was \$1.50 per person. (AACOA 213, BW-RT 308, PIO 338). The Twelve Traditions were adopted unanimously by the attendees by standing vote. (AACOA 43, LOH 121, PIO 338)

1952: Sep, Al-Anon Family Groups AFG sent a memo to AA asking permission to use its 12 Steps. AA agreed unofficially but felt strongly that AFG should be a separate society and not a subsidiary of AA. In September 1952, AFG adopted an adaptation of the 12 Traditions of AA. (LR 177-178)

1953: Jun, the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* was published. Bill W. described the work as “This small volume is strictly a textbook which explains AA’s 24 basic principles and their application, in detail and with great care.” Bill was helped in its writing by Betty L and Tom P. Jack Alexander also helped with editing. It was published in two editions: one for \$2.25 for distribution through AA groups, and a \$2.75 edition distributed through Harper & Brothers for sale in commercial bookstores. (AACOA ix, 219, PIO 354-356)

1955: AA’s 15th anniversary and 2nd Int’l Convention at St Louis, MO. On Jul 3, by resolution, Bill W and its old-timers turned over the stewardship of the AA society to the movement. The Conference became the Guardian of the Traditions and voice of the group conscience of the entire Fellowship. The resolution was unanimously adopted by the Convention by acclamation and by the GSC by formal resolution and vote. (AACOA ix, 47-48, 223-228)

1957: Apr, the 7th GSC recommended that: “No change in Article 12 of the [Conference] Charter or in AA Tradition or in the Twelve Steps of AA may be made with less than the written consent of three-quarters of the AA groups.” (SM S87)

1958: Apr, the 8th GSC recommended that: “the GSC recognize the original use of the word ‘honest’ before ‘desire to stop drinking’ and its deletion from the Traditions as part of the evolution of the AA movement. Any change to be left to the discretion of AA Publishing, Inc.” This advisory action is worded in a manner that can give the erroneous impression of a change to the wording of Tradition Three. It actually involved removing the word “honest” from “honest desire to stop drinking” in the AA Preamble in the Gv. It also led to changing the wording of the Preamble from “AA has no dues or fees” to “There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.” The changes were approved by the General Service Board in the summer of 1958 (www.aagrapevine.org also *Best of the Grapevine*, vol.1, 274-275)

1960: The General Service Board adopted a policy that: “The Board believes that AA members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but that in each situation the final decision must rest with the family.”

1965: Dec, Bill W enthusiastically embraced a campaign to promote vitamin B3 (niacin - nicotinic acid) therapy and created Traditions issues within the Fellowship. (PIO 388-390)

1968: Apr, the 18th GSC recommended that: “The showing of the full face of an AA member at the level of press, TV, and films be considered a violation of the Anonymity Tradition, even though the name is withheld. (PI)” The Conference also recommended: “That the Board adopt the following policy statement to be used in answering inquiries relating to posthumous breaking of anonymity: The board generally believes that AA members think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but that in each situation the final decision must rest with the family.”

1972: Apr, the 22nd GSC recommended that: In accordance with AA’s Tradition of self-support, the GSC voted unanimously that AA not accept *Stepping Stones* property (the home of Bill and Lois W) for any purpose. (FI Act)”

1976: Apr, the 26th GSC recommended that: “In case a change is needed in the *Twelve Traditions*, the *Twelve Steps*, or the *Six Warranties* of Article 12, wherever the words ‘registered AA groups of the world’, ‘registered groups’ or ‘directory-listed groups’ appear in the *AA Service Manual and Twelve Concepts for World Service*, a bracketed sentence be inserted to state, ‘This would include all AA groups known to the GSOs around the world.’ (Rept/Ch)”

1988: Apr, the 38th GSC recommended that: “AA members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but in each situation the final decision must rest with the family.” Further, the AA Archives continue to protect the anonymity of deceased AA members as well as other members. (PI)”

1992: Apr, the 42nd GSC recommended that: “the six point definition of an AA group be removed from all literature and replaced by the long form of Tradition Three and a section of Warranty Six, Concept XII ... (Lit.)”

1993: Apr, the 43rd GSC recommended that: “Each area delegate encourage discussions within all AA groups on the spiritual principles of Anonymity, including photographs, publications and posthumous Anonymity, as related to our Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions.” The Conference also acted upon but declined to recommend a failed advisory action that: “The Conference finds that the initiation of litigation involving trademarks and service marks is a violation of Warranty Five. (Ad Hoc Cmte Chips/Medallions)”

1995: Apr, the 45th GSC acted upon but declined to recommend a failed advisory action: “That the General Service Board and its subsidiary boards, AA World Services Inc. and The AA Grapevine Inc, initiate no litigation in defense of copyrights and trademarks, in accordance with Tradition 10 and Warranty 5. (FI. Act.)”

Third Tradition Story (Two items that often are erroneously intermingled)

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The man disappeared shortly after. (BW-FH 8, PIO 317-318) Anecdotal accounts erroneously say that this individual went on to become one of the best 12th Steppers in NY. This story is often erroneously intermingled with that of a 1937 incident (“year two” on the AA calendar) involving an Akron member that is discussed in the Tradition Three essay in the 12&12 (pgs 141-142).

The Order of the Traditions

The order of the Traditions was defined in April 1946 and nothing can be found to state what influenced the sequence in which they were written.

The April 1946 Grapevine article states:

Almost any A.A. can tell you what our group problems are. Fundamentally they have to do with our relations, one with the other, and with the world outside. They involve relations of the AA to his group, the relation of his group to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, and the place of Alcoholics Anonymous in that troubled sea called Modern Society, where all of humankind must presently shipwreck or find haven. Terribly relevant is the problem of our basic structure and our attitude toward those ever pressing questions of leadership, money and authority. The future may well depend on how we feel and act about things that are controversial and how we regard our public relations. Our final destiny will surely hang upon what we presently decide to do with these danger-fraught issues!

Now comes the crux of our discussion. It is this: Have we yet acquired sufficient experience to state clear-cut policies on these, our chief concerns? Can we now declare general principles which could grow into vital traditions—traditions sustained in the heart of each AA by his own deep conviction and by the common consent of his fellows? That is the question. Though full answer to all our perplexities may never be found, I'm sure we have come at last to a vantage point whence we can discern the main outlines of a body of tradition; which, God willing, can stand as an effective guard against all the ravages of time and circumstance.

Acting upon the persistent urge of old AA friends, and upon the conviction that general agreement and consent between our members is now possible, I shall venture to place in words these suggestions for ***An Alcoholics Anonymous Tradition of Relations—Twelve Points to Assure Our Future.***

The sequence of the Gv essays that Bill wrote do not follow the sequence of the Traditions until December 1947 through November 1948 when he wrote an essay for each Tradition in numerical sequence (later incorporated into the 12&12 and AA Comes of Age).

Bill W's Traditions essays from August 1945 to November 1947 were:

Modesty One Plank for Good Public Relations - Aug 1945

“Rules” Dangerous but Unity Vital - Sep 1945

The Book Is Born - Oct 1945

A Tradition Born of Our Anonymity - Jan 1946

Our Anonymity Is Both Inspiration and Safety - Mar 1946

Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition - Apr 1946
Safe Use of Money - May 1946
Policy on Gift Funds - Jun 1946
The Individual in Relation to AA as a Group - Jul 1946
Who Is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous - Aug 1946
Will AA Ever Have a Personal Government - Jan 1947
Dangers in Linking AA to Other Projects - Mar 1947
Clubs in AA - Apr 1947
Adequate Hospitalization: One Great Need - May 1947
Lack of Money Proved AA Boon - Jun 1947
Last Seven Years Have Made AA Self-Supporting - Aug 1947
Traditions Stressed in Memphis Talk - Oct 1947
Incorporations: Their Use and Misuse - Nov 1947