

## HOW ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS BEGAN IN NORTH CAROLINA

Alcoholics Anonymous in North Carolina can trace its origins to an experimental program for treating people addicted to narcotics which started in 1935, the same year A.A. began, at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital at the federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky. Dr. Tom M., the son of a prominent Shelby, N.C. physician and a morphine addict on top of his alcoholism, entered this "Narcotics Farm" in Lexington in 1939 to take "the cure," and while there, discovered a newly published book – Alcoholics Anonymous – that changed his life. Dr. Tom, whose story Bill W. called "one of the greatest ever to come out of Alcoholics Anonymous," contacted the A.A. office in New York by mail and expressed interest in finding an A.A. group near his home in Shelby upon his release. Since there was not an A.A. group closer than Richmond at the time, the office forwarded 6 copies of new pamphlets and encouraged Dr. Tom to form a group in Shelby. In the fall of 1939, he and three alcoholics held the first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in North Carolina in his office. It was a thrill for the New York office and a milestone for A.A. as a whole because it was one of the first groups formed only through the mail without direct contact.

According to the records at G.S.O., the Shelby Group first appeared in the Eastern United States Directory of A.A. groups in June of 1941 and was officially registered on December 18, 1941. An article submitted to the August 1945 Grapevine, written by W. B. McL. of Shelby, stated that by 1945 the Shelby Group boasted of 40 "solid members" and clubrooms in an uptown hotel where they had the "usual club furnishings, lockers, showers, piano, radio, pool table, reading room, and a seating capacity of one hundred and twenty-five."

With help from the New York office and visits from travelling members including Bill W. in 1941 and Dave R., an A.A. member who came south from New Jersey as a boiler inspector, the Shelby Group helped start groups in Gastonia, Charlotte and Asheville, as well as upstate South Carolina by the mid-1940's. Springing from a single "doctor, alcoholic, addict" with a Big Book in his hand, today there are more than 1100 registered groups with a membership of approximately 18,000 alcoholics in North Carolina. You will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny!

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