

**A.A.
ON
OAHU**

Hawaii Area
Archives Committee
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PREFACE

The following pages, titled "A.A. ON OAHU; The First Twenty Years: 1943-1962" are not represented as being a definitive history of A.A. on Oahu. Such was not the intent in assembling the material which is offered therein.

The attempt to produce a reasonably complete and accurate history of A.A. on Oahu is limited by a variety of factors, not the least of which are (1) the absence of any evident systematic effort to collect and preserve historical data until the early 1980's, (2) the demise or relocation of the earliest members of A.A. on Oahu before such an effort was initiated, (3) the sometimes conflicting remembrances of the same events by those long-time members who still reside on Oahu and (4) the seeming reluctance of members to part with such personal memorabilia as they may have collected over the years. In addition, an overly restrictive concept of anonymity in the earliest days of Oahu A.A. may well have been a contributing factor to the paucity of information which is available to the Archives Committee.

The eight pages which follow are offered to the Fellowship as a mere skeleton on which it is hoped that the meat of our earliest history can be hung. It is hoped that this work will serve as an "aide memoire," better enabling members to see areas of error or omission which they can help to correct or fill. Perhaps they will read these pages and will realize that they have a letter, a flyer, a program, a tape recording, a photograph, a newspaper clipping, a meeting schedule, a home group list, or a remembrance which can add to this historical framework.

Your Archives Committee truly realizes "that we know only a little;" however, we are hopeful that, through your response to our earnest solicitation of your support and assistance, "more will be revealed." Your materials can be loaned or donated, as you may prefer. Please contact by E-mail archives@area17aa.org

A.A. ON OAHU

The First Twenty Years: 1943-1962

The date that the first member of Alcoholics Anonymous came to Hawaii is lost to history, but it is known that individual members of A.A. were stationed on Oahu as members of the U.S. armed forces soon after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It is not unreasonable to suppose that one member sought out another member, and the two held the first meeting of A.A. in the Islands, perhaps in a barracks, or in a dayroom, or aboard ship.

Although it is a matter of conjecture when the first A.A. meeting was held on Oahu, it is fairly certain that any meetings held prior to December of 1943 were informal, and were unregistered with what was then known as the Central Office of the Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Office), in New York. The first formal meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous on Oahu was held in Room 15, at the Y.M.C.A., on Atkinson Drive, in Honolulu, on Tuesday, December 14, 1943. Five people attended that first meeting; all had been sober for at least one week, and one had been sober for a month!

The first A.A. group on Oahu registered itself as "The South Seas Branch of Alcoholics Anonymous" (although the Central Office listed it in the A.A. Directory as the "South Sea Group of Honolulu"). The first meeting was the culmination of an exchange of correspondence between a 32-year old boat builder, Euell G., and Central Office, beginning in October 1943. Euell had been provided with a single pamphlet about the A.A. program, and a one page letter, offering advice and encouragement. Armed with this material, and an ardent desire to stop drinking, he recruited six members. He informed Central Office that "three are permanent residents and three are workers from the mainland. It is quite a representative group."

The South Seas Group appears to have been the only Oahu group for several years. The A.A. Directory of August 1945 lists the "Pearl Harbor Group;" however, that group was not listed in any subsequent directory. Indeed, no group other than the South Seas Group was listed in the A.A. directory until five years later.

Little is known of the activities of the South Seas Group. The A.A. Directory of August 1945 shows the group had 9 members. The number grew to 10 by the following year and, according to the August 1947 Directory, there were 40 members in the group. This information is contradicted by a letter to Central Office from Les.H, in early 1947, in which it was reported that A.A. had "waxed and waned" in the South Seas Group and was, at that time, down to only two regular members - Les and George B.

Les H. expressed the belief that Euell had "tried to crusade too much and it was his downfall."

An article in the Honolulu Advertiser of August 11, 1947, reported that "Dr. Charlotte Biddle, well-known psychiatrist, addressed the members of Alcoholics Anonymous at their first open meeting, on August 4th," in Honolulu. The fact that an open meeting was held would suggest that more than two members were involved in the program. Later, on June 8th, 1948, the Advertiser reported that "A.A. shed a bit of its anonymity last night to give an audience of some 100 persons a glimpse of its methods, ideals and its purpose at the Mabel Smyth Auditorium." The article went on to say that "Although the local AA group holds monthly open meetings at its clubroom, this was the first appearance of local AA members as a group before an audience." Further, "The leader of the local AA group explained that six to twelve alcoholics are placed in the hospital each month through the help of AA in Honolulu." (The A.A. Directories of 1947-1949 show the South Seas Group Club at 930 Fort Street, where the Pioneer Plaza is now located; this was probably the "clubroom" referred to in the article. The contact person is shown to have been Evelyn S.)

Another member (identified in his monograph only by the initials B.M.) explained the condition of A.A. of the period in this way: "There were many servicemen in Hawaii during the war who were sober members of A.A. and A.A. functioned while they remained. When the war was over and the service men returned to the mainland, they took all of the sobriety with them. There seems to have been a lull in activity from then until September of 1951."

This view would seem to be supported by the Directory of A.A. groups. The Kaimuki Group appears in the 1951 directory (and is shown to have contributed \$73.33 to the Central Office in 1950, apparently the year it was formed). In a 1983 taped interview, John M. (called J.C.) remembered that group as being the only one on Oahu when he joined the program, on February 3rd, 1951. One of the Kaimuki Group members, a man called Van, operated a liquor store in the Alexander Young Hotel, on Bishop Street, and he took all of the telephone calls for A.A. "help," including J.C.'s call.

J.C. remembered that the Kaimuki Group met at Central Union Church, in what had once been a caretaker's house. The group, which had about 12 members, sat around a large, round, oak table in the kitchen. A.A. soon began to grow at a faster rate; the Kaimuki Group engaged a telephone answering service, run by a non-alcoholic, who would telephone the group secretary whenever a 12 step call was received, at whatever the hour!

An article, appearing on the editorial page of the Honolulu Advertiser, on February 23, 1951, stated that "about 65 members meet here (in Honolulu) regularly, aided by about 250 other members who help out from time to time, as needed." The article mentioned that "one member here recently received telegrams and letters from all over the country, congratulating him on having passed four years without a drink." It said that this member

"pointed to the need of a central office or meeting place where the members could operate day or night, if necessary." The article concluded by estimating that "there must be from 15,000 to 20,000 persons in the Territory who are fit material for the D.T. ward."

According to the A.A. Directory, the Kaimuki Group had 35 members in 1951, grew to 50 members by 1952, and in 1953 had 75 members. By this time, the group had outgrown its Beretania Street quarters and had leased space on Halekauwila Street, in downtown Honolulu. With the change of location, it became the Central Group. J.C. recalled that the space "had to be leased and (the lessor) insisted that the person who signed the lease have good credit. Well, we had a number of fairly substantial members in the group by that time. We had two attorneys and a man who was a CPA, but not one of these fellows would sign the lease; they were not going to break their anonymity. Anonymity in those days, 1951, was a lot more sacred than it is today (1983)."

J.C. reported that he signed the lease "and was never stuck with the rent;" but even these new quarters were soon too small, and a still larger room was obtained in the same building. He recalled that "the very first meeting in the new location, they announced they were starting the Aloha Group, which was going to have open meetings. The term 'open meetings,' at that time, was about as bad as swearing in church. Because that was something terrible -- to have open meetings -- we didn't believe in open meetings."

B.M. recalled that "some of the members of Central Group decided that they wanted to hold open meetings families and/or friends had become interested in the program. A meeting room was located in the E.E. Black building, behind Kawaihāo Church, and the Aloha Group was started." Founded in April 1954, the Aloha Group later met in the Board Room at the Libby Cannery and then at St. Andrew's Cathedral. For many years it has met at the YWCA, on Richards Street, in downtown Honolulu.

B.M. wrote that "efforts were made by the members of the Central Group to open up groups in other parts of the island, A room was rented on Liliha Street for a period of time, and two members patiently waited for newcomers who never appeared. Groups were formed in Kailua -- lasted for a while and folded."

Hawaii was becoming more conscious of the problem of alcoholism by this time. A Territorial Alcoholism Clinic opened in October, 1955 (at 548 Kapahulu Avenue). Its administrator, a Mrs. Toomey, reported treatment of 108 patients in its first two years, but noted that one-third of these did not follow through with treatment. She observed that these often came "only to satisfy court orders." Somewhat earlier, in July, 1954, the Hawaii Committee on Alcoholism was founded, with John H. (J.C.) as its first Executive Director. B.M. remembers that J.C. served without pay in this capacity for several years. He noted that the HCA served as a source of

information to schools and institutions, and it offered a counseling service to alcoholics, members of their families and to the general population.

The increasing awareness of the problem of alcoholism seems to have been reflected in a moderate growth in A.A. groups on Oahu. According to a story in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin (on July 14, 1956) and in the Advertiser (on July 16), "the Waikiki Group of Alcoholics Anonymous (recently) moved to its own headquarters and meeting place at 473 Ena Road. The article informed readers that "Since its formation last November, the Waikiki Group of AA has been meeting at Kapahulu Library. Due to rapidly expanding membership and other considerations, the members voted to establish a home of their own," The article noted that "Waikiki is one of several (A.A.) groups in this area with the result that somewhere on the island there is an A A meeting every day and two on Sunday." The Waikiki Group was shown to have meetings on Tuesday and Thursday, at 8 p.m.

Attempts had been made to get A.A. established on the Windward side of Oahu in the early 1950's, but the seed of A.A. did not immediately grow. The Windward Oahu Group, with 10 members, is listed in the 1953 Directory. The A.A. directories continued to show the Windward Oahu Group until 1957, when it was not listed. Herb W. , who became a member of the Aloha Group when he entered the program in January of 1955, remembered the permanent establishment of A.A. on the Windward side as follows:

"In 1957, we decided to start our own group on the Kailua side of the island. By then there were about five of us who were determined to get things started and keep a group on this side going on scheduled dates. First, we started a meeting at our homes. Each week a member would host a meeting. Announcements were made at the Aloha Group meetings and those members would come over on Wednesdays and join us in our meetings. Naturally, because of the large attendance we had to find a larger and more permanent place. We first met at the Methodist Church, which was located at the present location of the Cornet Store, then we moved to the St. Christopher's Church Library. Father Minton, the predecessor to Claude, permitted us to use the library on a scheduled basis. We met on Mondays and Fridays, and have done so since then," (Founding members, in addition to Herb W. (who has more than 33 years of sobriety, and remains active in A.A. on Oahu), included Joanna M., Ed W., Frank M., Kurt and Ben S.)

Fran B. , who came into A.A. in October 1958, attended her first meeting at the Kaneohe Group at the Calvary Church. She remembered the Kaneohe Group as "being the only A.A. group on the Windward side at that time," but she acknowledged (in a 1985 interview) that she only later became aware of the existence of other groups on Oahu, such as "the Central Group, the Aloha Group, the Hickam Traditions Group, and a group out at Pearl Harbor." (As has been pointed out, the Waikiki Group was also in existence at that time. Indeed, as recently as January 22, 1957, the Star-Bulletin had reported that the group was offering 24-hour emergency telephone help.)

As was previously noted, military members have played an active and important role in A.A. on Oahu from the beginning. The absence of on-base meetings was rectified in 1956, with the creation of the Hickam Traditions Group, started by Corrine L. and H/Sgt Bud B. Although the group no longer meets on Hickam Air Force Base, it has been in continuous service to A.A. since that time, A group was begun that same year at Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station, but this group lasted for only a few years. It has periodically reappeared and disappeared over the years, but our A.A. friends in the Marine Corps have remained active in service to Oahu A.A.

A.A. moved into the Oahu State Prison at this time. J.C. remembers getting a call from Warden Harper, asking that A.A. meetings be started in the prison. He conducted a weekly meeting for two hours every Monday for ten years. In order to get the guards removed from the meeting room, so that the prisoners could speak freely, J.C. had to assume personal responsibility for the prisoners. Art B. and Bud T. were also active in carrying the message to the prisons. Don H., who attended his first meeting while an inmate of the Oahu State Prison, later became chairman of the institutional committee. (In order to perform his duties, it was necessary that the Governor grant a dispensation to allow him, as an ex-con, to return to the prison as a visitor. This permission was obtained.)

The A.A. Directory for 1959 shows that there were six A.A. groups on Oahu, with a reported 114 members. By 1960, there were seven groups and 141 members. Included in this number were the Waialae-Kahala Group {which then, as now, met on Thursday night at Waikeola Church on Kilauea Avenue) and the first Central Oahu Group, the Kokua Group, which met at the Chapel Annex on Wheeler Air Base.

In the late-summer of 1960, the Central Group moved to Sand Island, where it opened the first rehabilitation facility in Hawaii, in an old, abandoned Army chapel. Group members first had to rehabilitate the structure itself. According to the Advertiser of December 4, 1960, "one man put aside his contracting work for days to install water lines, bathroom and kitchen facilities. Another, a landscape architect, brought his crews to rehabilitate the grounds. By the first week of October, the church, now called 'Half-Way House,' was fit to live in." The article reported that "in slightly more than two months, (Half-Way House) has "graduated" two men back to purposeful lives, and now is housing seven more who are well on their way to rehabilitation." The Central Group remains on Sand Island to this day; its meetings remain closed. Fran R., then a member of the Central Group, remembered that the move to Sand Island cost the group several of its members "because it was so far out of town (and) many of the women members didn't feel safe driving out there for the Monday night meeting." Bud T. recalled objecting to the use of his 7th Tradition contribution to help underwrite the operation of the halfway house, and said that others detached themselves from the Central Group over that issue.

There were, in 1960, at least two "central offices," handling help calls from members/potential members. Echo L. had been manning a "help line" out of her home

for several years -- initially as a service of the Waikiki Group -- and the Central Group had formed the Aloha State Intergroup, which met at the Sand Island halfway house. During a Founders Day presentation on May 31, 1985, Butch C. (now sober for 36 years) recalled that a heated argument broke out during one of the Sand Island intergroup meetings in the fall of 1961, "and thirteen of the people just walked out." They went to Kelly's Restaurant (still located at the corner of Nimitz Highway and Puuloa Road) where, over coffee, they created the "Honolulu Intergroup of A.A.," from which have evolved our present Oahu Intergroup and our Hawaii Area Committee. The "dissidents" included Butch C., Ben S., Fran R., Chuck H., Corrine L., Arnold N., Art B., Bernice E. and Cathy C., among others. Butch C. was the first Intergroup Chairman, a six month commitment, and office space was located in the since-demolished First Methodist Church, at the corner of Beretania and Victoria Streets.

In taped reminiscences, made in 1985, Bud T. recalled that the "start-up" costs for Intergroup were underwritten by "Chief," the secretary and treasurer of the Aloha Group. Herb W., during the 1985 Founders Day celebration, had recalled that "Chief was our Secretary and Treasurer for about five years, until the members could allow him to get on so (they) could find out what happened to the money that was contributed (during those years}." It seems that Chief had built up a "prudent reserve" of \$1,200 to \$1,500, part of which was contributed to Intergroup. (The A.A. Directory shows that the Aloha Group contributed \$750.00 to G.S.O. in 1962. The other 22 groups on Oahu contributed a total of \$474.00; thus, it would appear that "Chief's" reserve was put to good A.A. use.)

Concurrent with the formation of this new intergroup structure, a burgeoning growth in A.A. took place. The Ala Moana Group, the "Wilder Avenue A.A. Group" and the Young People's Group are three of the still-extant groups which came into being at that time. Soon thereafter, the Lingle Awhile Group and the Kahaluu Group came into being. The A.A. Directory shows that there were 23 groups, with 285 members, by the end of 1962. However, the December 2, 1962 issue of the Mynah Bird (the Intergroup newsletter, edited by Rocky H.), listed 27 groups, holding 30 weekly meetings; hence, the Oahu membership may well have been larger than the A.A. directory indicated.

The year 1962 also witnessed the first of our annual Hawaii A. A. conferences. Bud T. remembered suggesting that intergroup consider holding a picnic» whereupon Hap T. said that he had been thinking in terms of a conference, rather than just a picnic. Bud T. had been accompanied to that meeting by a newcomer, Arnold N., who became co-chair of the first convention, together with Hap T. (EN: Arnold N., then a member of the Hickam Traditions Group, less than a year sober, now has more than 32 years of sobriety, and he remains active in Oahu A.A. affairs.). From the date of the suggestion until the actual Conference, held at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, November 10-11, 1962, only six weeks elapsed. Bud recalled that the two speakers, Bill L. and Howard A., both from Los Angeles, paid their own costs to come to the event.

The Conference took on an international flavor from the beginning when two recovering alcoholics -- one from France and the other from New Zealand -- saw the small

Convention notice in the hotel lobby and attended! They were joined by 100 others who attended the first Convention. The event was an overwhelming success and it marked the end of the infancy period of A.A.'s growth on Oahu. A.A. was truly coining of age on our island paradise.

POSTSCRIPT

The foregoing historical sketch has been culled from a variety of sources, the most important of which is "A Brief History of Alcoholics Anonymous in Hawaii," an unpublished draft, produced by the Hawaii Area Archives Committee in mid-1988. Use has also been made of "History of A.A. General Service of Hawaii (Called Intergroup} and Oahu A.A. Intergroup of Hawaii," dated August 1988, compiled by Ben C. Taped recollections of John M., Bud T., Herb W., Fran R., Butch C., Vic B. and Roy C., have proved very useful, as have personal conversations with Arnold N., George M., Jack H., Herb W., Tommy C, Paul C, and many others who have been willing to share their recollections and give me a "feel" for A.A. as it was more than thirty years ago.

Many days and weeks have been spent poring through the archival materials collected over the past 10-12 years by Pat W., Fran R., Bernie W., Mike S., Marion B. and others who have participated in our fledgling archival effort. I have also spent many fruitful hours in the basement of the State Library, reviewing back issues of the Honolulu newspapers for tidbits of information related to A. A. growth on Oahu.

I urge you, the reader, to find fault with the product of my effort and point me toward ways to improve it. Especially would I appreciate your steering me toward information, files, collections, etc. which have not been, but might become, available to me in this effort.

It is my present intention to continue to research the history of A.A. on Oahu, and throughout Hawaii, with a view toward future production of a fuller history -- not just covering the first twenty years, but extending through the formation of the Hawaii Area Committee, to the more recent past. With your assistance, and the continuing guidance of my Higher Power, I hope to be a channel for the production of a work of value to present and future members of our Fellowship.

T.K.

