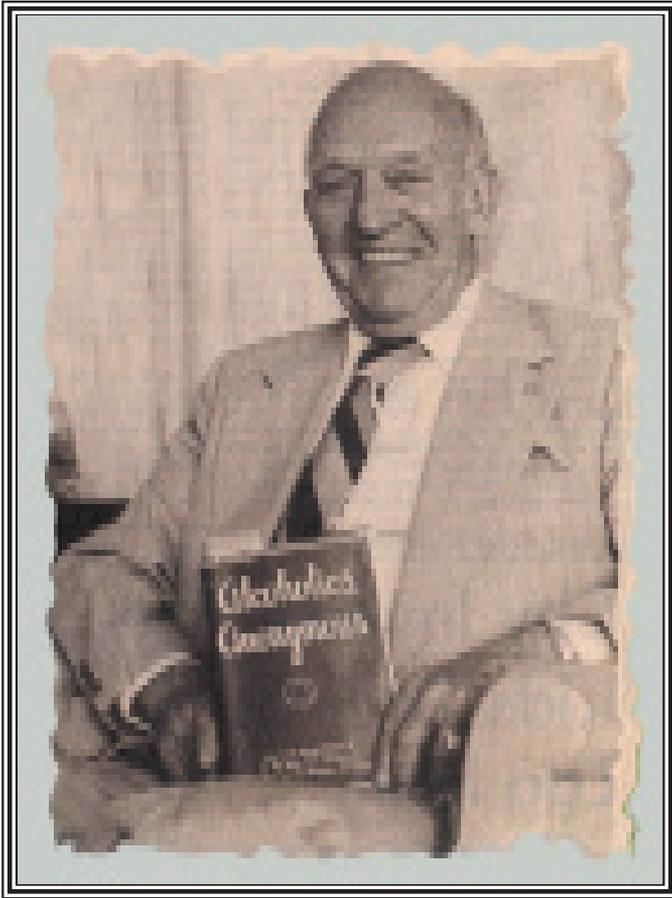


A.A. PIONEER

CLARENCE H. SNYDER



THE
“HOME BREWMEISTER”

On February 10, 1938, Clarence H. Snyder, a hopeless alcoholic, was admitted to Akron City Hospital in Akron, Ohio. His admitting physician was Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith.

Clarence had been living on the streets of New York City after his wife Dorothy threw him out of his home in Cleveland, Ohio. He had been “on the bum” for several years, unable to hold down a job or support his family. He returned to Cleveland to try to get back into his home. Dorothy’s sister, Virginia, had told her about a doctor in Akron who was successful in “fixing” drunks. Virginia’s personal physician, Dr. Leonard Strong, was the brother-in-law of a former New York stockbroker who also had found success in reforming alcoholics. That brother-in-law was Bill Wilson.

Other recovered alcoholics who had been helped by Dr. Smith visited Clarence. They told him their stories of how they were no longer drinking. They also told him that they had the answer to his problem with alcohol. After almost a week in the hospital Clarence asked Dr. Smith about this answer ... this “prescription for a miracle.” He wanted to know how he, too, could be relieved of his obsession to drink.

Dr. Smith, also known as “Doc” and “Dr. Bob”, told Clarence to get out of the hospital bed and get on his knees. He instructed Clarence to pray a simple prayer. He told Clarence to ask Jesus Christ to come into his life and told him that he would have to turn his will and his life over to his Lord and Savior. Dr. Bob told Clarence that if he followed his directions he would never drink again. Clarence believed Dr. Bob, followed the directions, and never had another drink of alcohol. Clarence considered February 11, 1938, his sobriety date ... his first full day without alcohol. Forty-six years later, when Clarence died in March of 1984, he was the last member of the original 40 members of Alcoholics Anonymous. He had 46 years of continuous sobriety.

Dr. Bob took Clarence to meetings of the Oxford Group held at the home of T. Henry and Clarace Williams in Akron, Ohio. He attended these meetings faithfully for 15 months. His wife and son welcomed him back home.

When the book ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS was written, Clarence critiqued the draft chapters and his story, “The Home Brewmeister”, is included in all three editions of the Big Book.

In May 1939, one month after the A.A. book was published, Clarence

went to his sponsor, Dr. Bob, and told him that the Cleveland contingent could no longer attend the Oxford Group meetings in Akron. The Catholic members from Cleveland were being ostracized by their church and were being threatened with excommunication. He told Dr. Bob that they would take the name of the just published book and that this was “going to be an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for alcoholics and their families.” From the Oxford Group, he said, they would take the “Four Absolutes” (Honesty, Unselfishness, Love and Purity). He said that with these four and the Twelve Steps anyone could get well.

The first gathering of what was known as an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting was held on May 11, 1939, at the home of Abby G. (a/k/a Al G.) on 2345 Stillman Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Nell Wing, Bill Wilson’s secretary from 1947 until his death in 1971 and A.A.’s first archivist said that Clarence was rightly the first person to use the initials A.A. in reference to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Clarence was instrumental in the early growth and success of A.A. Cleveland’s members were staying sober... Dr. Bob and his following in Akron were still attending Oxford Group meetings (well into the fall of 1939), and New York members were having a difficult time recruiting members who could stay dry.

Clarence generated some of A.A.’s early publicity. He convinced the Cleveland Plain Dealer to publish a series of articles favorable to A.A. This brought on an influx of new members unheard of then. Clarence developed a method of personal sponsorship with mass numbers of people. One of the first pamphlets printed about A.A. was called, “Mr. X and Alcoholics Anonymous”. Mr. X was Clarence.

Meetings were sprouting up all over Cleveland. Members stayed sober, and the message of hope and recovery spread. Bill Wilson wrote in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* that, “Cleveland’s results were the best.” Bill traveled to Cleveland often to learn what they were doing that worked so well.

In 1941, Clarence coordinated Cleveland members’ in helping Jack Alexander understand what A.A. was all about; it’s success and potential growth. Mr. Alexander published his article about A.A. in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Other early innovations credited to Clarence are:

- forming the first Central Committee in A.A.,
- developing A.A.'s first newsletter, the Bulletin to All Groups that in 1942 became the Cleveland Central Bulletin,
- initiated the practice of rotation of officers both at meetings and with the Central Committee,
- wrote A.A.'s first pamphlet on sponsorship in 1944, and,
- helped organize a convention celebrating A.A.'s 10th anniversary in Cleveland. Over 3000 AA's attended representing over 25 states and Canada. This was A.A.'s first unofficial international convention.

Clarence sponsored AA's who went on to start A.A. groups in Houston, Texas (Larry J.), Charleston, West Virginia, Atlanta, Georgia, Indianapolis, Indiana, (Irwin M.) and several other areas around the U.S. and Canada. During his lifetime Clarence sponsored several thousands of alcoholics.

Clarence believed that alcoholics were chosen people. They were special. He also warned, "unless you stand for something - you're liable to fall for anything." Clarence stood for God, for recovery, and for living the A.A. way of life in all of his affairs. He did not compromise his principles. Nell Wing said that, "if it weren't for his abrasive personality, Clarence might have been considered a tri-founder" of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Clarence knew that A.A. worked only as well as the individual member would, as Dr. Bob so simply stated, "Trust God, Clean House and Help Others." He knew that one could live life "Happy, Joyous, and Free" just as he had for over 46 years.

Clarence H. Snyder was a recovered alcoholic and a true A.A. Pioneer.

*Adapted from a summary written by Mitchell K. who wrote
How It Worked: The Story of Clarence H. Snyder and the
Early Days of Alcoholics
Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio.*

While the book is out of print, you can see or download the entire text at:

www.aabbsg.de/chs/

See Mitchel K's History Site at: www.aabbsg.de/chs/history.links.htm