

WHO WAS HANK G. PARKHURST ?

In 2019, Central Recovery Press published William H. Schaberg's Writing the Big Book. This 761 page tome is the author's attempt to trace the history of the writing of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous. At the same time, the author discovered and documented many myths surrounding the early history of the Big Book.

But what is fascinating about this historical research book is the role that Hank G. Parkhurst played in the formulation of the Big Book as well as the AA Foundation.

Parkhurst was a very close friend of Bill W. At one time, during the 1930's, Parkhurst's salary was \$40,000, an astonishing amount during the Great Depression. However, Parkhurst lost that salary due to his alcoholism and it was Bill Wilson who helped Hank get sober. Parkhurst was a man of ideas as well as a promoter. In fact, according to Schaberg, Hank was a bigger promoter than Bill himself.

So what was so special about Hank Parkhurst? According to Schaberg, Parkhurst could be considered the real co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, it was Parkhurst who first coined the term "Alcoholics Anonymous." Parkhurst also prodded Bill into putting down the philosophy of getting sober in the form of a book. It was Parkhurst who also gave Bill an outline of what he thought should be included in the book even though the titles for the chapters in the first 164 pages were conceived by Bill. Parkhurst was also the man who felt the need to form a non-profit foundation to carry on the work of helping people recover from alcoholism. Hank was a consummate idea man, so much so that he often scribbled notes, ideas, suggestions that were hard to fully understand. Bill was much more deliberate. He took Parkhurst's ideas, notes and suggestions and translated them into intelligible form. Parkhurst and other early New York recovering alcoholics made suggestions for the book that never were used by Bill. For example, Parkhurst insisted on the need for a Q & A chapter, something Bill never considered. But it was Parkhurst that got Bill writing his story and the chapter

"There Is A Solution". These two early chapters became the basis for which both Bill and Hank used to promote the idea that came to be known as the Big Book.

So why isn't Hank G. Parkhurst considered the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous? The reason is because Parkhurst never stayed sober. Neither did Ebby. So, according to Schaberg, Dr. Bob got that title, co-founder, by default. Dr. Bob stayed sober after meeting Bill and remained sober until his passing.

The book project, as it was known to the New York alcoholics, was rejected by the Akron alcoholics primarily because they felt it was a money making scheme contrived by the New Yorkers, especially Bill and Hank. In fact, Bill kept Dr. Bob in the dark for some time about his work on the book. Eventually, Bill convinced Dr. Bob of the importance of having a book and asked Dr. Bob to spearhead the effort to convince the Akron alcoholics of its value.

Another interesting fact was Bill Wilson's break with the New York Oxford Group. As Bill was working on the chapter "There Is A Solution", it became obvious to him that the Oxford Group's requirement for membership insisting that "a new recruit must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery and others which frequently accompany alcoholism" and that unless he will do this absolutely, he could not be a part of the Oxford Group. Bill felt that this would exclude many alcoholic non-believers, agnostics, atheists. Bill felt there needed to be a more tolerant approach, one that would allow a person to acknowledge his own "higher power" concept. In addition, the Oxford Group was a Christian movement that relied heavily upon the New Testament. Again, Bill felt this put too much emphasis on religion and not enough emphasis on a solution for alcoholism that worked. So Bill broke with the Oxford Group in New York some time well before the Akron alcoholics began meeting on their own. Schaberg attributes part of the



delay in Akron with Dr. Bob not wanting to offend Henrietta Seiberling who was a strong advocate of the Oxford movement.

One final comment concerns Bill's story of his meeting with Ebby. In Bill's version, the two men met in Bill's kitchen, just the two of them. It's a very compelling story that in fact is a myth. Ebby himself explained in great detail that the actual event included several other people including Bill's wife. But Bill, in writing his story, felt that the myth would have much stronger appeal to suffering alcoholics than adding a lot of other information. So the myth stuck. There are other examples in this rich history of the Writing of the Big Book worth reading if you have the time and money to purchase the book.