

History of the Oldest City Group

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The “ROOTS” of the Oldest City Group of Alcoholics Anonymous as told by its co-founder – Margaret S.

1947 – Conception of A.A. in St. Augustine.

Having had a drinking problem, Margaret asked for help from a friend in Jacksonville Muffit who had gotten sober through the “Peabody” method. This method of sobriety was of no avail to Margaret and her friend recommended A.A. as a way of recovery. (foot note 1.)

A woman from Green Cove Springs took her to her first A.A. meeting in Jacksonville, on Forsythe St. For months, she attended one meeting a week by taking the bus from the Oldest City to Jacksonville. Unbeknown to her, another St. Augustine resident was also attending A.A. in Jax, but on a different meeting time. This man wished to protect his anonymity to the fullest extent in the community and to this date, his request has been protected.

However, Admiral Davidson and three other A.A. members decided that they would hold a meeting in St. Augustine and that these two should meet. They met at Margaret’s home on 330 Oglethorpe Ave but the other man did not show up so they carried the meeting to his house. As a result of that first meeting a common bond was formed between the two of them and in that year of 1947 – A.A. was born in St. Augustine. At first, they shared with each other at their respective homes. On the front porch, in the kitchen or on the street.

Then in the year 1948, Margaret was asked to make her first 12 Step call and as a result, there were now THREE members in the group. (F,2), Later on an A.A. member from up north moved to St. Augustine (F.3) and bought a bar on Anastasia Island. It was there – in the bar that their A.A. meetings were held. Meetings were occasionally interrupted as the Chairman of the meeting had to serve a bar customer.

Naturally there was no format to their meetings, all they had was the Big Book and a desire to stop drinking. Nevertheless – the group grew and they moved to the Arts Club Bldg. on Marine Street where they paid \$5.00 a month for a small room. The news of what was going on in the small room became known

in the community and outside people became interested. A local doctor attended their meetings and treated – free of charge – any of the members. Later, Gilmer’s Nursing Home became the first drying-out place for alcoholism in St. Augustine.

From the Arts Club Bldg., they once again moved – to the Old Orange Grove. Through their own efforts and contributions. They scrubbed; painted; and furnished these meeting rooms. It was about at this time that the second woman member joined the group. (F.4.) She donated the TWELVE STEPS and the meetings became more organized.

It was also at this time –1950-1951—that another citizen, Bill Toomer, took an interest in A.A. and offered a larger meeting room. So, what was now known as the Oldest City Group of A.A., moved to the Florida Power and Light Bldg.

The growth in membership demanded another move and through a benefactor they then held their meetings in the Flagler Hospital.

It should be noted that during these growing years, Margaret S. was absent from the group for periods of 3 to 4 months at a time because of traveling with her husband. Exact dates and events pertaining to the group itself are not clear.

Notes

1. Muffet, a navy man, although non-A.A., was a true supporter of Alcoholics Anonymous. Even though he attained and maintained his sobriety as the result of the “The Peabody Method” he knew that this would not work for everyone and that A.A. was the best for most. His wife was a member of A.A. The woman from Green Cove Springs was the wife of a Navy man and it was she who Muffet sent to take Margaret to her first A.A. meeting.
2. Jacksonville A.A. contacted Margaret and asked her to talk with this man who needed help. She went by herself because the only other A.A. member was working. So not only was she the first woman in St. Augustine A.A. – but she is was a woman who made the first 12 step call in St. Augustine A.A. Ironically, the first man brought into A.A. was appointed treasurer of the group and later absconded with the group’s funds which were going to be used to go and hear Marty Mann, the first woman member in A.A.*****

3. The bar owner was with Al Capone during the Prohibition era and Margaret recalls that most of the meetings at the bar were centered around this man and his experiences in boot-legging. As a note of interest, their meeting place was called the Gin Mill.
4. The 2nd woman in the group was the wife of a Count who lived in New York. He did not want or allow her to associate with A.A. due to social acceptance in his royal way of life. So, when she vacationed in Ponte Vedra for the winter months, she attended meetings in St. Augustine.