

Is The Mystery Solved?

By Gary N.

Written in the *We Share Our Georgia Experience*, published in 1995, is the following account of how AA arrived in Atlanta (page 145):

"Army officer Steve M., who had recently attained sobriety in Washington, D.C. came to Atlanta in June 1941 . . . **A defrocked minister, Sam D.**, answered the ad and sat in the post office . . .the two men met . . . they held the first meeting of AA in Georgia at Steve's apartment . . ." (bold added by me).

As well as Georgia's *We Share*, Washington D.C.'s archives document the same Steve M. as one of "The Boys of '39" that began the first A.A. group there. Steve M.'s move to Atlanta ties Atlanta's A.A roots to Bill W. Except a bit of a mystery has evolved. The Jack Alexander article, published March 1, 1941, three months previous to Steve M.'s arrival in Atlanta, already has A.A. in Atlanta. How could this be?

In addition, Bill W. seems to have thought that Atlanta A.A. at least came from Cleveland, rather than New York via Washington D.C. If so, Cleveland, A.A. in Atlanta would be first tied to Dr. Bob, and the A.A. anniversary in Atlanta would be earlier than currently celebrated.

On page 25 of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* one can read about Irwin M. from Cleveland:

"[Irwin M was a salesman who] used to range a territory bounded by Atlanta and Jacksonville on one side and Indianapolis, Birmingham, and New Orleans on the other." Irwin is described as an A.A. "missionary." "Irwin had long since broken all the rules of caution and discreet approach to newcomers, so it was with reluctance that we gave him the list [of prospects in the south]. Irwin ran them down, every single one . . . Day and night; besides, he wrote letters to his prospects and got them to writing each other."

"Shortly **after** the beginning of A.A. in Atlanta, that skaky group was sparked by the appearance of **Sam, a high-powered Yankee preacher**, temporarily minus frock and salary (bold added for emphasis by me)."

Sam provides the match of information in *Alcoholics Comes of Age*, written by Bill Wilson in 1957, with *Georgia Share* written in 1995, and the match is through a "defrocked minister" Sam D.

According to Bill Wilson, A.A. was already in existence in Atlanta prior to Sam joining A.A! Thus, Sam couldn't possibly have been at the first meeting of A.A. in Atlanta! Bill W. contradicts Georgia's *We Share*! Bill W. gives Irwin M. the credit of founding the first meeting in Atlanta, and if accurate, then Atlanta's original A.A. ancestry comes from Cleveland, and then Akron, and then Dr. Bob.

A call has been placed to New York Archives to find a list of southern "topers" and hope it still exists. This southern list, as described by Bill W., would be found at "the New York Headquarters [where] we had on file a long list of topers in many a Southern city . . ." The southern list was the list of names given to Irwin M. by Bill W., with some reluctance. This list, however, may provide to us a long lost valuable record of early A.A. history in the south. While Bill W was reluctant to provide Irwin with that list, that list may provide a long lost record of A.A. in the south that might otherwise be lost.

Is this Atlanta A.A. origin mystery solved? I'd say not for sure. But stay tuned, more shall be revealed.