

The First AA Meeting in Atlanta

by: Gary N.

The first AA meeting in Atlanta was held on November 29, 1940, which is around seven months earlier than the June 12, 1941 date that we in Atlanta celebrate as our anniversary. This information has been obtained from the AA Archives in New York, and results from their research.

However, after examining this new information with Avery of our Central Office, there seems to be no reason to change the anniversary date of June 12, 1941 as currently celebrated. Though there were meetings in AA earlier than we thought, the people that conducted the meetings didn't stay in Atlanta. Consequently, there isn't an unbroken chain, as there is from our current anniversary date.

I'm going to include the contents of an email I received from New York from an archives assistant there, which explains the history of AA in Atlanta we didn't previously know.

Dear Gary,

Greetings from GSO Archives! It is a pleasure to be in contact with you!

Our earliest correspondence coming out of Atlanta, GA is dated in late 1940. .

Several relative excerpts from letters are:

The earliest letter we have in our records is to Mr. Marion H. from the GSO dated 11/26/40:

We first heard of your interest in Alcoholics Anonymous through a letter from our mutual friend, Irwin M., who we call our traveling correspondent. He keeps rather closely in touch with us while moving about the country on business,,,

From Mr. Marion H. to the GSO, dated 11/30/40:

Many thanks for your encouraging letter and copy of the Bulletin, which I have turned over to Mr. C.K.P. We had a meeting last night, but Sam M. did not attend.

From Mr. Marion H. to the GSO, dated 1/31/41:

Thanks for your letter... to the Atlanta Group. Unfortunately, this writer is the only one of the active group now in Atlanta. C.K.P. left the day after Christmas for the west coast...

There are several letters from this time that have referrals. The GSO sent Marion H. names and addresses of people interested in AA in the Atlanta area.

A letter from Frances D. (Mrs. Sam S.D.) to the GSO, dated 4/2/41 discloses:

Enclosed are two newspaper articles about my husband. The first dated December 3, 1940, brought little or no response for employment. But in the meantime, he took a commission job, selling Good Year tires. He made no money, he became depressed, and just as this radio work came to be a reality, he began to drink. Now, he's going to lose this opportunity, just as he has many others in the past 8 years, since he left the Ministry. I've combed Atlanta and suburbs for the name or names of some Alcoholics Anonymous. The one name [Marion H.] I have secured is a traveling man and is away from town indefinitely. Will you please rush any information you can give me as to whom to get in touch with... I am reading Alcoholics Anonymous now. My husband has read excerpts from it, and likes the idea.

A response from the GSO dated 4/3/41 states:

We are sorry indeed to advise you that at the moment, there are no AA members in Atlanta to whom we could refer you and Mr. D for information and assistance. As you know, [Marion] is not at home at the present writing; however things are spreading so rapidly since the publishing of the article in the Post that we hope to get things really started in Atlanta soon.

A letter to the GSO dated 7/15/41 reveals:

At the direction of the Atlanta Group, we are taking this means of thanking you for the pamphlets you so generously sent us to aid in promoting our group. If you could attend one of our meetings, see the miracles taking place and hear the testimonies given, you would be happy in seeing the progress we are making... Some of us in the group have been tremendously interested in AA for a long time and exceedingly anxious to start a group here. Efforts were made a number of times but without permanent results. Stephen M., of the Washington group moved to Atlanta, and through his splendid efforts we actually began operations... On June 12, seven of us met with Mr. and Mrs. [Stephen] M. in their home. Last Tuesday evening, July 8, forty people were at the meeting in parlors A and B in the Robert Fulton Hotel, our regular meeting place...

*Very sincerely yours,
Sam S. D.
Ernest H.S.
J.H.M.*

Another letter from Sam D. to the GSO dated 10/27/41 discloses:

For 16 years, I was a successful minister in the Presbyterian Church. One pastorate was the "Old First" Church, Brooklyn, where John Barleycorn whipped me. I have started over again, thanks to AA's solution to my problem.... We enjoyed Irwin M.'s visit and received a number of helpful suggestions from him.

In regards to Sam D., Bill W.'s "AA Comes of Age" mentions him briefly, stating:

Shortly after the beginning of AA in Atlanta, that shaky group was sparked by the appearance of Sam, a high powered Yankee preacher...

The book does not claim that Sam D. started AA in Atlanta. According to the correspondence that I have shared with you, this seems to be the most accurate. There were whispers of AA in Atlanta before Sam D.

Steve M. was an early AA member in Atlanta. I have mentioned him in the above correspondence excerpts as Stephen M.

I hope that this information has been helpful. If you have any more questions, please feel free to contact us at Archives@aa.org.

Take care,

Svetlana G.
Archives Assistant