1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Dr. Bob's Home (Dr. Robert and Anne Smith House)

Other Name/Site Number:

Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior October 16, 2012.

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 855 Ardmore Avenue Not for publication:

City/Town: Akron Vicinity:

State: Ohio County: Summit Code: 153 Zip Code: 44302

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: X	Building(s): X
Public-Local:	District:
Public-State:	Site:
Public-Federal:	Structure:
	Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing		Noncontributing	
buildings	1	buildings	0
sites	0	sites	0
structures	0	structures	0
objects	0	objects	0
Total	1	Total	0

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Bungalow/Craftsman

MATERIALS:
Foundation: Brick
Walls: Wood
Roof: Asphalt
Other: Brick (porch and chimney)

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Summary

Dr. Bob's Home, located on its original site at 855 Ardmore Avenue, is still very much a part of its built environment, an early twentieth-century suburban neighborhood in west Akron, Ohio. In 1935, Dr. Robert Smith (Dr. Bob) and Bill Wilson (Bill W.) began the mutual support group that became Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Only a small placard on the front porch, a commemorative rock on the front lawn, and a sign above the front porch that reads "Welcome Home!" identify this house as different from those around it. The establishment of AA marked a turning point in the history of alcoholism and its treatment. In addition to being the place where Robert Smith achieved his own sobriety, the home is significant to the institutional history of Alcoholics Anonymous because it was here that the philosophy and early practices that underlie AA's program were first articulated and debated. Throughout the summer of 1935, Robert Smith, Bill Wilson, and Anne Smith held daily discussions on alcoholism here at this house. This mutual support instilled in both Smith and Wilson, two alcoholics, the commitment and confidence to achieve permanent sobriety. Later, some of the stories that went into the first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous,* known among AA members as "the Big Book," were written in the Smiths' dining room. Dr. Bob's Home also provided a meeting space for the organization during its first years as well as a location where various methods used as part of the AA program were first developed and tested. AA philosophy and practices that were first implemented at this site would form the core of AA's Twelve-Step program. Alcoholics Anonymous eventually rested on "three pillars"—religion, medicine, and the fellowship of alcoholics—all of which were first articulated in Dr. Bob's Home.[1]

Historic and Present Physical Appearance[2]

Built in 1914, the frame house that Robert and Anne Smith occupied from 1915 to 1950 can best be classified as a Craftsman-style bungalow. Wood (horizontal clapboard siding) is the primary exterior material, set on top of a brick foundation. Situated on a small corner lot well above street grade, the two-and-a-half story building has a commanding presence on the block. The façade has two prominent gable-roof dormers and a low-profile gable porch supported by brick pillars. The interior includes a basement garage on the east side of the home, and a main floor with a kitchen, dining room, and living room. The second floor has three bedrooms and a bathroom. The attic is split into two open spaces with low, angled ceilings reflecting the dormers and rooflines.

Location and Setting

Dr. Bob's Home is located on a small corner lot at 855 Ardmore Avenue in Akron, Ohio, on its original site. The surrounding neighborhood retains its character as an early-twentieth-century residential subdivision of single-family detached homes. The house is approximately two blocks from Exchange Street, a busier road with some businesses. The neighborhood is characterized by a grid pattern, with narrow, rectilinear lots. Most homes retain their historic character along Ardmore Avenue, which remains paved with bricks. The house is set back from the street and has a lawn and garden bed surrounding the front and west sides, and a retaining wall next to the sidewalk on the south and east elevations. The west side also has a narrow sidewalk that leads between the neighboring house to the rear, past a narrow garden abutting Dr. Bob's Home.

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[1] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, By a Co-Founder* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1985), 236.

[2] Adapted and expanded from David Snider and David Simmons, "Dr. Robert Smith House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1985).

Exterior

Between 1984 and present, Dr. Bob's Home has been slowly restored to its historic design as a Craftsman-style bungalow (ca. 1914) to its appearance during Dr. Bob and Anne's residency. As part of this restoration work, the home was completely rewired, and major support beams in the basement were replaced. The house plan is rectangular, with a hipped-roof porch on the main façade (south elevation), a bay window (east elevation), and rear porch and kitchen extension (northwest corner). The house is two-and-a-half stories, painted in white with muted yellow trim, gray asphalt gabled roof; the brick covered concrete foundation is laid in stretcher bond. Made of balloon-frame construction, the first floor is sheathed in weatherboard and the upper stories with shingles. The exterior construction materials are original to the building. All of the eaves on the home project out from the frame and have brackets and exposed rafters. Additionally, all of the windows and doors have their original trim boards. The brick foundation is partially exposed around the entire building. Gutters are located along all of the eaves, with downspouts at each corner of the house.

Twelve steps lead from the sidewalk up to a full-length wooden porch that extends out from the façade (south elevation). This porch has a low-gable roof, oriented with the peak toward the street, supported by brick columns on either side. There is a wood railing with decorative cutouts and a foundation with lattice-like brickwork, which reveals the workmanship of the period. The first floor has a front door, slightly off the center, with a set of side-by-side double hung windows on either side. Above the porch's gable, the second floor has a double hung window on either side of the peak, in addition to a small window in the center of the peak. Two dormers extend from the half-story attic, each with two side-by-side windows, while the gable roof of the house is pitched away from the street, with peaks on the west and east elevations of the house.

On the west elevation, the house has six windows. Narrow transom windows distinguish the first story's southern end, with a double-hung window above on the second floor. The northern end of the first floor has two double-hung windows, the one located farthest north is smaller than the other one, which is more centrally located. There is another smaller double hung window on the second floor at the northern end. The peak has two double hung windows side by side.

The east elevation of the building is defined by a narrow cut into the side of the sloped lot, through the brick foundation, that allows access to the basement via double wooden doors (used by Robert Smith as a garage). This is a unique architectural feature among the homes in the neighborhood. Cement retaining walls extend from the foundation to mark the driveway. There is a small window in the brick foundation on the northern end. In the center of the first floor is a bay window, composed of three narrow, double-hung windows, with a shed roof. Above this, on the second floor, are two double-hung windows. In symmetry with the west elevation, the east side has two side-by-side double-hung windows at the half-story peak.

A small, raised porch featuring lattice enclosures and an addition to the otherwise rectangular footprint of the house's foundation mark the rear west corner of the north elevation. The porch leads to a back door off the kitchen. There are steps with metal railings leading down from the east side of this porch. Above this addition is a second-floor porch with a simple railing and ribbing in wood with a door leading out from the bathroom.[3]

In the center of the first floor of the north (rear) elevation is a door cut into the foundation and opening to the basement steps. Above this is a bumped-out wall dormer rising through the second floor becoming a dormer at the roof level capped with a low-shed roof. There is a double-hung window at the second floor, and two small

[3] A story that is repeatedly told in AA circles claims that Bob Smith would frequently toss bottles of alcohol that were wrapped in his driving gloves onto this second-floor porch so that he could enter through the back door, pass his wife Anne's inspection, and proceed upstairs to retrieve the liquor. Alcoholics Anonymous, *Smith and the Good Oldtimers*, rev. ed. (1980; repr., New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2004), 40.

transom windows in the roof dormer. The brick clad chimney rises on the west side of the dormer. The eastern side of the north elevation has two evenly spaced transom windows on the first floor, and a single, double-hung window on the second floor is framed between them.

Interior

The interior also possesses a high degree of historic integrity in terms of feeling and association. Indeed, as Smith reflected, all of the nooks and crannies of the house were a part of his daily struggle with alcoholism, "if my wife was planning to go out in the afternoon, I would get a large supply of liquor and smuggle it home and hide it in the coal bin, the clothes chute, over doorjambs, over beams in the cellar and cracks in the cellar tile…"[4] Because these features, among others, still exist in the house, visitors can make the direct link between Smith, his struggles with alcoholism, and the recovery process that has defined his home as the cradle of AA.

The front door opens off of the porch into the living room, where the central features are a restored gas-lit brick fireplace with short, narrow built-in book cases on either side on the north wall and a stairway with a landing in the northwest corner of the room centered with the front door, leading upstairs. A Craftsman-style post and railing separate the pine staircase from the living room. The floors are hardwood. Wallpaper covers the walls and the windows and doors are finished with wood trim.

The dining room is to the west separated from the living room by an opening featuring short square columns set on paneled half walls, which make the space feel open and connected to the living room. The dining room has a restored oak floor, as well as original furniture, and is wallpapered. Characteristic of the home's Craftsman style, the ceiling has coffered wood beams and low paneled walls. A door located in the north wall accesses the kitchen.

The kitchen is located in the northwest corner of the first floor. Like other spaces in Dr. Bob's House, the kitchen is restored to the period of significance. Appliances, cabinetry, hardware, furniture, as well as the coffee pot, are all intended to evoke the experience of a particular time and place. The sink and refrigerator are located on the kitchen's south wall to your left, as you enter from the dining room. On the east wall to your right is the stove and on the west wall is the back door. A small bathroom is located in the northwest corner of the kitchen. Most importantly to the integrity, the kitchen is where Bill Wilson, Anne Smith, and Robert Smith sat and discussed the Twelve Steps that became the hallmark of AA. As Smith recalled, "There was hardly a night [during the three months of Bill's stay in the summer of 1935] that we didn't sit up until two or three o'clock, talking. It would be hard for me to conceive that, during these nightly discussions around our kitchen table, nothing was said that influenced the writing of the Twelve Steps."[5]

On the second floor, there are three bedrooms in the southeast, southwest, and northeast corners. There is also a bathroom in the northwest corner, as well as a small closet across from the stairway on the south wall between the two bedrooms. The bathroom has the original linoleum flooring, as well as a door on the north wall leading to the second floor sun porch and a laundry chute. The original linoleum flooring also covers Bob and Anne's bedroom. The two smaller rooms have carpeting. The smallest in the northeast corner was originally their daughter Sue's room and is known as the "Surrender Room." It continues to be the space where many current members of Alcoholics Anonymous kneel and surrender to a higher power. The other bedroom, which was their son Smitty's room, is sparse, with two small bed frames and a dresser from the period. When Smith and Anne welcomed alcoholics into their home in the early years of AA, this room was frequently used to "dry" them out. A second set of stairs behind a door leads to the half-story attic, currently used for showing films to visitors.

[4] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Smith and the Good Oldtimers*, rev. ed. (1980; repr., New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2004), 40.

[5] Ibid., 97.

While it has not been restored to the extent of the rest of the house, there are no significant alterations to this space.

In the basement, a false-ceiling was removed after the 1984 purchase by the Founder's Foundation, allowing the original ceiling to be exposed. Originally divided into three small rooms—a laundry room, coal room, and fruit cellar—and the garage, the only remaining alteration is a missing wall, which once separated the garage from the rest of the basement. The stairs, located in the center of the laundry room, lead first to a landing with a door that opens north to the outside. From here, the wooden stairway turns back and leads into the kitchen through a door to the right of the entrance from the dining room.

Since being purchased by the Founders Foundation in 1984, Dr. Bob's Home has been restored and interpreted to its period of significance, 1935–1950; these were the foundational years of Alcoholics Anonymous. During this time, Bob and Anne Smith resided here with their children (Sue and Robert "Smitty" Jr.). Bill Wilson resided in the home during the summer of 1935, a time when he and Smith, with the help and influence of Anne, fleshed out the details of Alcoholics Anonymous. Thousands of visitors come to the site each year to commemorate this founding moment and the mutual support movement nurtured in the home. The building conveys a strong sense of place, a feeling shared by visitors who are "welcomed home" nearly every day of the year. The home had five owners between 1950 and 1984 who altered, and at times neglected, the home to varying degrees, but in its current presentation and state of restoration, it appears as it did during the period of significance.

Today, Dr. Bob's Home, as a historic house museum, continues to offer visitors the feeling and association of being in a particular place and time. As one visitor commented, "It felt as though Smith had just stepped out to make a house call. The feeling of sitting at the table and drinking a cup of coffee like many recovering folks of the last 7 plus decades was amazing. There is no flash, no glitz, just the simplicity of the man, his wife, and the program they helped to found."[6] Visitors are welcomed to the house daily, and the annual Founder's Day celebration in June attracts thousands of people from around the world.[7]

Dr. Bob's Home retains a high degree of historic integrity in terms of the building's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The Founders Foundation is committed to interpreting and maintaining the property based on its period of historic significance, because it is also a place of continued importance to current members of AA.

[6] Anonymous comment, "A Truly Spiritual Experience," *Yahoo Travel*, November 23, 2008, accessed October 13, 2011.

[7] For example, Founder's Day 2011 attracted more than 10,000 people over the three day celebration at the University of Akron. Jim Carney, "Sobriety Reigns in Akron," *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 10, 2011.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide:__ Locally:__

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A X B X C__ D__
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__
NHL Criteria:	1 and 2
NHL Criteria Exceptions:	N/A
NHL Theme(s):	I. Peopling Places 2. health, nutrition, and disease II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements 2. reform movements
Areas of Significance:	Social/Humanitarian
Period(s) of Significance:	1935-1950
Significant Dates:	1935-1939
Significant Person(s):	Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith, Anne Ripley Smith
Cultural Affiliation:	N/A
Architect/Builder:	unknown
Historic Contexts:	XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements B. Temperance and Prohibition

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Summary

Dr. Bob's Home is nationally significant under NHL Criteria 1 and 2. Due to its central role in the establishment of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a global organization whose mission is to assist alcoholics in achieving and maintaining sobriety, the site meets NHL Criterion 1. Through its association with Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith (Dr. Bob) and Anne Smith, who are nationally significant for their work in establishing Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, the property also meets the requirements for NHL Criterion 2. Along with William Griffith Wilson (Bill W.), Robert Smith is considered a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

The establishment of AA marked a turning point in the history of alcoholism and its treatment. Understanding the central role of Dr. Bob's Home as a site of healing for alcoholics is vital to the foundation and expansion of AA. In addition to being the place where Robert Smith achieved his own sobriety, the home is significant to the institutional history of Alcoholics Anonymous because it was here that the philosophy and early practices that underlie AA's program were first articulated and debated. Throughout the summer of 1935, Robert Smith, Bill Wilson, and Anne Smith held daily discussions on alcoholism here at this house. This mutual support instilled in both Smith and Wilson, two alcoholics, the commitment and confidence to achieve permanent sobriety. Later, some of the stories that went into the first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous,* known among AA members as "the Big Book," were written in the Smiths' dining room. Dr. Bob's Home also provided a meeting space for the organization during its first years as well as a site where various methods used as part of the AA program were first developed and tested. AA philosophy and practices that were first implemented at this site would form the core of AA's Twelve-Step program. Alcoholics Anonymous eventually rested on "three pillars"—religion, medicine, and the fellowship of alcoholics—all of which were first articulated in Dr. Bob's Home.[8]

The period of significance for this property is from 1935, when Smith and Wilson met, until 1950, which is when Smith died. These fifteen years witnessed the creation of Alcoholics Anonymous, the codification of tenets central to what would become AA's program, and the rapid expansion of the AA program beyond Akron. As the location of AA's origin, and witness to its growth and development, and as the property most strongly associated with Robert and Anne Smith and their work in developing AA, Dr. Bob's Home was vital to the later work undertaken by AA co-founder, Bill Wilson, and his wife, Lois Wilson. After 1950, the Wilsons expanded and extended the AA message from their New York home, Stepping Stones (NHL, 2012).

Currently, Dr. Bob's Home is owned by the non-profit Founders Foundation. It has operated as a museum since 1984.[9] In addition to presenting material on the establishment and early years of AA, the museum is interpreted to the 1930s. Visitors to the house are met with the greeting, "welcome home," thus underscoring the importance of the space as important to the beginnings of AA. The importance of Dr. Bob's Home as the birthplace of AA is commemorated every summer on Founder's Day, June 10, the anniversary of Dr. Bob's last drink, when members of the AA community and its supporters come to Akron from all over the world to celebrate.

Alcoholism Before AA

From its birth in the early friendship of Smith and Wilson in Akron, Ohio, AA has reshaped the ways in which Americans viewed alcoholism. Yet the founding of this organization was not the first time Americans

[8] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1985), 236.
[9] "Dr. Bob's Home," *Founders Foundation*, accessed October 28, 2011, https://www.drbobshome.org.

contended with the challenges of alcoholism. During the eighteenth century, Americans generally approved of alcohol consumption, but adamantly opposed excessive drinking. A frequently drunk person—almost universally depicted as a man—was understood to be incapable of restraint or grace, depraved, and ultimately responsible for his own behavior. Popular depictions invariably portrayed inebriates drinking distilled spirits (hard liquor), which were much more potent than fermented beverages. Nevertheless, alcohol consumption, particularly of hard liquor, dramatically increased in popularity between 1760 and 1830.[10]

The increasing popularity of distilled spirits, which became lower in price and easily available when compared to beer, wine, and cider, stemmed from the production of surplus corn along the American frontier. During the American Revolution, the rising abuse of hard alcohol caused disciplinary and functional problems for the Continental Army. Troubled by this and other similar problems, many leaders of early America sought to understand the behavior of individuals who chronically drank to excess. Laws which punished public drunkenness also sought to manage intoxication as a social problem. These early concerns sparked medical studies of those drawn to frequent drink and the reasons for their desires. These studies examined the alcoholic and alcoholism, or what was typically called "intemperance," throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[11]

Benjamin Rush, one of the young nation's most eminent doctors and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was among the first Americans to assess habitual drunkenness from a medical standpoint. Like other commentators of his time, Rush believed that hard liquor was the primary problem in extreme and increasing drunkenness, and that consumption of large volumes of hard liquor caused madness, disorderly households, and a general lack of moral and physical hygiene.[12] Rush shared the common view that chronic drunkards were in some way depraved, but he proposed that the craving could be inherited as well as inadvertently "contracted."[13] Thus, Rush was one of the earliest public advocates of what came to be called a "disease" model of alcoholism.

Rush's disease-theory advocated that alcoholics wishing to cure themselves of their love of drink "should abstain from them *suddenly* and *entirely.*"[14] Prominent among the cures for intemperance that Rush promoted was the power of inspiration, through which family members, the plight of other drunks, or religious convictions suddenly motivated alcoholics to cease drinking. For much of the nineteenth century, approaches to treating inebriates revolved around similar familial, societal, and religious influences.

Throughout this period, many Americans promoted religious inspiration as a cure for alcoholism. Temperance societies to aid drunkards appeared soon after Rush's initial publication on the ills of intemperance. These societies were largely organized under existing religious organizations and included both rural and urban dwellers as well as members of all socio-economic classes.[15] In 1826, a national umbrella organization for local temperance societies emerged. Ten years later this organization, the American Temperance Society (ATS) adopted a position insisting on total abstinence. Beginning in 1790, temperance groups had used moral suasion

[10] See W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8–9, Appendix One.

[11] Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 30–33.

[12] Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and the Mind, with an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies for the Curing of Them*, 8th ed. (Boston: James Loring, 1823). Rush's Inquiry was originally printed in 1784, was widely re-printed, and went through numerous editions in the antebellum United States.

[13] Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 8, 21, 25.

[14] Ibid., 26.

[15] Joseph F. Kett, "Temperance and Intemperance as Historical Problems," *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 4 (March 1981): 878–885.

to promote moderation in drinking; by the 1830s, with a nationally standardized message, temperance groups began to advocate for comprehensive legal prohibition of the sale of alcohol.[16]

In the mid-nineteenth century, public drunkenness was condemned outright. Because of the social stigma attached to intemperance, which was viewed as a sinful condition, both alcoholics and their families struggled to conceal their addiction. Some reformers understood excessive drinking as a personal moral failure, while others saw the problem drinker as being infected by a disease of the devil. Though vilified, some habitual drunkards were persuaded by this moral reasoning and sought out temperance movements, even pursuing the mutual support of fellow inebriates to form their own temperance societies, just as Smith and Wilson would do a hundred years later.[17]

An exception to the predominantly religious temperance groups were the Washington Temperance Societies, organizations made up of heavy drinkers who pledged never to consume alcohol again. For the Washingtonians, saving the inebriate from dissolution was of primary concern; instead of general social reform, they stressed non-sectarian mutual aid, personal accountability, and moral suasion (through a form of social redemption).[18] At their gatherings, the Washingtonians shared personal experiences of intoxication and its negative effects as a way to prevent relapses into drinking. By telling their stories, the Washingtonians admitted their prior wrongs and witnessed others do the same. As inspirational accounts, these stories were a form of spectacle, and the Washingtonian meetings evolved into massive public events for drinkers and non-drinkers alike. While the Washingtonians had given a public face to the idea of the inebriate being capable of moral redemption, the effect of confession often did not last and many members relapsed. Hostilities from the mainstream temperance societies also created rifts within the Washingtonian communities and by 1847, most Washington Temperance Societies had disbanded.[19]

Fraternal societies also made an attempt to reform drunkenness. These groups, which included small groups of men (women were typically excluded), used the principles of mutual support and the practice of confession found in the Washingtonian movement but within the context of a private, intimate environment.[20] Internally, fraternal societies supported their alcoholic members. Externally, however, the secrecy and anonymity inherent in these groups severely limited their influence on and participation in the national temperance efforts taking place at the time.

While these groups focused on problem drinkers, temperance societies like the ATS sought to outlaw alcohol consumption altogether. The prohibition movements had mixed results on state and local levels throughout the nineteenth century. Two organizations led the fight for prohibition during the postbellum period, the Anti-Saloon League and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).[21] Both organizations directed their reform efforts against an increasingly popular American social space: the saloon. Modeled after the French *salon*, the saloon was initially a lavishly decorated, welcoming social space for wealthy Americans. Over time, the idea spread across the country into rural, frontier, and immigrant communities and the "saloon" became associated with low moral fiber, enticements to drink (such as free lunches and free drinks for newcomers), and

[16] Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 64–74.

[17] William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* (Chestnut Health Systems Publication, 1998), 6.

[18] Katherine A. Chavigny, "Reforming Drunkards in Nineteenth-Century America: Religion, Medicine, Therapy," in *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800–2000*, ed. Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 112.

[19] Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800–1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 26–31.

[20] Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 78–79.

[21] For the origins of the WCTU, its leader Frances Willard, and the relationship between the prohibition movement and Women's Suffrage, see Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 66–84.

other "debased" activities (especially prostitution and gambling).[22] The saloon also reinforced conventional gender roles, with men participating in public drinking there while "respectable" women avoided such establishments at all costs. This image of the saloon as a place promoting corrupt morals inspired the Anti-Saloon League's push for full prohibition; by proving that they could sway voters to support "dry" candidates, the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU shaped political races and encouraged elected officials to take a position—dry or wet.[23] These two stark political positions would color federal and regional elections until the years following federal Prohibition in 1920.

Concurrent with the rise of the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU, physicians devoted renewed attention to alcoholism. This work revived the disease model of alcoholism previously articulated by Benjamin Rush and ensured that this concept was available to a new generation of medical practitioners, some of whom influenced the co-founders of AA. In postbellum America, terms like "inebriety," "dipsomania," and "alcoholism" came to describe the disease of habitual drunkenness, which could be inherited or self-induced.[24] Medical professionals who adopted the disease concept of alcoholism concluded that treatment for inebriates required isolation and institutional care. While religious and moral suasion were not dropped from treatment programs, a new norm arose in the physiological and psychological treatment of addiction: institutionalization. Within an institutional setting, alcoholics not only received support for their disease, but also isolation from sources of drink.[25]

In addition to religious temperance and medical institutionalization, a third therapeutic strain proliferated in the final decades of the nineteenth century: the commercialized alcoholism "cures." One of the most famous and profitable of these ventures was the franchises developed and implemented by the Leslie E. Keeley Company across the United States in the 1890s. Over the course of four weeks, patients residing at an institute received four daily injections of Keeley's "Double Chloride of Gold Remedy," a substance which Keeley asserted could permanently cure alcoholics as well as tobacco use and nervous disorders.[26] Although Keeley stressed the primary role of biological processes in alcoholism's causes and treatment, the institutes extended their care beyond chemical injections to include a relaxed atmosphere, methods to encourage healthy sleep and eating habits, recreational activities, and supportive socializing among patients and staff members, many of whom were themselves Keeley "graduates."[27] However, when the institutes' advertised success failed to match its patients' relapse rates, public pressure and medical criticism caused the institutes to crumble almost as quickly as they had risen to fame.[28]

After a century and more of debate over the inebriate question, few treatments or strategies had shown results. From the perspective of moral reformers and medical specialists alike, the problem of alcoholism seemed deeply embedded in American life, especially in particular racial, social, and economic classes. Was alcoholism a moral, individual problem? Or one that had to do with the substance itself? As medical science, psychology, and experimental treatments evolved in the early twentieth century, the division between these questions became less evident. Many experts saw alcoholism as a disease that seized an individual, but also as an ailment

[22] Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 97–109.

[23] Ibid., 124–131.

[24] Sarah W. Tracy, *Alcoholism in America: From Reconstruction to Prohibition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 25–62. Over time, "alcoholism" prevailed over other terms, as Tracy demonstrates, in part because "it specified the substance responsible for intoxication," thereby fitting in with the stance of the Anti-Saloon League and other temperance organizations for the prohibition of alcohol sale and consumption (41). See also Raymond G. McCarthy, "Alcoholism: Attitudes and Attacks, 1775–1935," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 351 (1958): 12–21; Mariana Valverde, "'Slavery from Within': The Invention of Alcoholism and the Question of Free Will," *Social History* 22, no. 3 (October 1997): 251–268, 254.

[25] McCarthy, "Alcoholism: Attitudes and Attacks, 1775–1935," 19–20.

[26] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 55.

[27] Ibid., 52–56.

[28] From a peak of 118 franchises in 1893, the number of Keeley Institutes declined to less than fifty in 1900; only four remained in operation by 1935, the year in which Alcoholics Anonymous was founded. White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 51, 58–60.

that affected a particular "sort" of person. These claims were often shaped by the emergence of eugenics, since proponents of the disease-concept believed that the condition could be inherited and pollute future generations. In many ways, alcoholism and the alcoholic symbolized the dichotomy between degenerate and industrious Americans as well as the perceived threat of a blurring of the boundaries between these two.[29] Because these explanations asserted that alcoholism could be both hereditary and "caught" like a cold, the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU saw a very real threat to America's future in the form of alcohol.

Over the course of the early 1900s, temperance groups like the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU gained sufficient congressional support to ensure a constitutional amendment banning the sale of alcohol. The Eighteenth Amendment, which banned the manufacture, sale, and transportation of "intoxicating liquors," came into effect on January 17, 1920. It stood until 1933.[30] Though alcohol was illegal to sell during this time, it was not technically illegal to consume, and the ban was not successful in forcing people to abstain from alcohol. While popular cultural depictions of the 18th Amendment often associate Prohibition with increased criminal activity, the act initially succeeded in greatly decreasing alcohol consumption.[31] Because Prohibition was poorly enforced after the first years of its enactment, bootlegging and speakeasies became increasingly common. The social goals of prohibition now came under question, as large numbers of Americans were participating in the moderate consumption of alcohol and doing so illegally.[32]

Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, understanding about the nature of alcohol and alcoholism, as well as ideas regarding the most effective methods to prevent and treat alcohol abuse, were in flux. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 suggested that alcohol in and of itself was not a substance threatening enough to public welfare to warrant government regulation.[33] With repeal, the language upon which Prohibition had been promulgated—of a moral war against an evil substance and its profligate consumers—no longer provided an adequate explanation for why problem drinkers existed and how they should be reformed.[34] In the meantime, there was little consensus or coordination among the religious groups, medical practitioners, psychotherapists, and commercial entrepreneurs, all of whom continued to offer treatment to Americans suffering from alcoholism. Further compounding this problem was the deepening economic stagnation of the Depression which made even traditional resources for alcoholics pursuing recovery scarce. By the years immediately leading up to AA's founding in 1935, alcoholics were "in need of help, but highly skeptical" of any formal structure or institution being willing or able to do so.[35]

Robert Smith and Anne Smith

Robert H. Smith, known within the Alcoholics Anonymous community as Dr. Bob, was born in 1872 to W. P. Smith, a judge and banker, and his wife S. A. Smith. Brought up in the strongly devout and largely dry community of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, Smith began drinking heavily after his matriculation at Dartmouth College in 1898.[36] At this time, Smith suffered only mild after-effects from alcohol abuse and he received his

[29] See Valverde, "'Slavery from Within': The Invention of Alcoholism and the Question of Free Will."
[30] For a discussion of the politics of the Eighteenth Amendment and its enforcement, see Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 136–165.
[31] For an analysis of the success of Prohibition, see J. C. Burnham, "New Perspectives on the Prohibition "Experiment" of the 1920's," *Journal of Social History* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1968): 51–68.
[32] Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 136–165.
[33] Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 25.
[34] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 26.
[35] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 127.
[36] "Robert Holbrook Smith, M.D.," *Encyclopedia of World Biography. Volume 30* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2010), accessed September 26, 2011, Gale In Context.

degree in 1902.[37] In 1905, after three years working as a sales agent in Boston, Chicago, and Montreal, Smith, who knew from an early age that he wanted to become a physician, enrolled at the University of Michigan to pursue medical studies.[38] Increasingly reliant upon alcohol to fuel a growing addiction, Smith left Michigan after two years. Following a move to Chicago and further study at Rush Medical College, Smith earned his medical degree in 1910. His first job after graduation was as an intern at Akron's City Hospital where he worked for two years and experienced a short-lived period of sobriety.[39] After finishing his internship Smith opened a general surgery private practice in 1912.

It was during those initial years in Akron that Smith finally married his longtime sweetheart, Anne Robinson Ripley. Born in 1881, Anne was raised with three brothers in Oak Park, Illinois. After completing high school, Anne won a scholarship to attend Wellesley College where she trained to become a teacher.[40] In 1898 at the age of seventeen, Anne met Smith while visiting a friend in Vermont. Following a seventeen-year courtship, the couple married on January 25, 1915, in a small ceremony held at Anne's mother's house in Chicago.[41] There is some scholarly speculation that Anne delayed her marriage to Smith for nearly two decades because of her concerns over his excessive drinking.[42] Following the wedding, Anne and Robert purchased what would be their first and only home, the property at 855 Ardmore Avenue in Akron, Ohio. In 1918, the couple welcomed the birth of their first child, Robert Ripley Smith, and in 1923 the couple adopted a five-year-old girl, Sue Smith.[43] It was here in this Craftsman-style house that Robert, Anne, and their children experienced the sorrows of alcoholism and, through the development of Alcoholics Anonymous, the inspiration of recovery.

Like other alcoholics at the time, Bob Smith and Bill Wilson both had personal experiences and a corresponding degree of disillusionment with existing treatment practices. Though Smith began to notice physical symptoms of his alcoholism (specifically, delirium tremens), his addiction continued to deepen throughout the 1910s. During Prohibition, he used his authority as a doctor to prescribe alcohol for himself; he also purchased bootleg liquor.[44] Although he was still regarded as a capable surgeon, he lost his post at City Hospital by the 1930s. With a dwindling private practice, he was deeply in debt.[45]

Supported by his father and wife, Smith signed himself into a local sanitarium more than a dozen times, all without long-term success.[46] Bill Wilson, the other co-founder of AA, also checked himself into the Charles B. Towns Hospital in New York for detoxification at least four times during the same period and doctors warned his wife, Lois, that permanent committal to an asylum might be the only recourse for a case as hopeless as his.[47] For both co-founders, the "drying-out" offered in these medical settings brought only temporary relief.

Desperate for a cure, Smith and his wife began attending meetings of the Oxford Group in 1933, learning its principles of self-examination, religious philosophy, and spiritual fellowship. The goal of the organization, in

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[37] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), 171. Smith mentions that he "never once in [his] life had a headache."

[38] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wilson, Bill, and Bob Smith," by Ann T. Keene, last modified July 2001, accessed October 19, 2011, https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1501283.

[39] "Robert Holbrook Smith, M.D.," *Encyclopedia of World Biography*.

[40] Charlotte Hunter, Billye Jones, and Joan Zieger, *Women Pioneers in Twelve Step Recovery* (Center City: Hazelden, 1999), 3.

[41] Ibid., 4.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Bob Smith, Sue Smith Windows, and P. Christine Brewer, *Children of the Healer: The Story of Smith's Kids* (Park Ridge, IL: Parkside, 1992), 2.

[44] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wilson, Bill, and Bob Smith," by Ann T. Keene; Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 176.

[45] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 69.

[46] "Robert Holbrook Smith, M.D.," *Encyclopedia of World Biography*.

[47] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 129; Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 33.

the words of founder Frank Buchman, was to provoke "world-changing through life-changing."[48] Concerned with combating the perceived spiritual sickness of the modern age, Oxford Group members engaged in spiritual exercises to cultivate in themselves four absolutes: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love.[49]

Robert initially attended the Oxford Group meetings reluctantly because of a longstanding aversion to religious practice. Anne, however, pursued the organization's tenets with enthusiasm from the start and helped to sustain her husband's participation.[50] Anne's journal, which she called the "Oxford Group Workbook," recorded her commitment to the group's teachings. Within its pages, she offered her own interpretations of and musings on the organization's principles and underlying philosophy. Many of these ideas would later be incorporated into the principles and practice of Alcoholics Anonymous when Anne shared her thoughts in conversations with her husband and Bill Wilson.[51]

Impressed by the seeming "poise, health, and happiness" of the Oxford Group, Smith acknowledged his alcoholism, two years later, in the spring of 1935.[52] However, because the group was not exclusively devoted to helping alcoholics abstain from drinking, Smith continued to struggle with his addiction even as he attended Oxford Group meetings. Nevertheless, the group provided invaluable support to Anne and connected the Smiths to a network of reform-minded individuals in Akron.

Founding AA

Through their common membership in the Oxford Group, Robert Smith met Bill Wilson. Wilson was born in Vermont in 1895 and raised by his maternal grandparents. Wilson's first seminal encounter with alcohol was in 1917, when he experienced a "sensation of freedom" from an awkward social situation after drinking a cocktail. Years later, Bill Wilson married and began working as a stockbroker. Throughout the 1920s, Wilson continued to have access to alcohol, despite Prohibition, and drinking became a way of life for him. For Wilson, drinking was a positive and liberating experience, until the stock market crash of 1929 shifted his approach to alcohol. He began drinking "to numb the pain, to forget." Between 1929 and 1934, Wilson lost control of his alcoholism and entered into an "alcoholic hell." Between 1933 and 1934, he entered the Charles B. Towns Hospital, a facility specifically designed to treat addicts, four times.[53]

In late November 1934, Wilson met with Ebby Thacher, a friend who had also been a hard drinker. When Wilson saw Ebby decline a drink, he was dumbfounded. Thacher explained that he had found sobriety through the Oxford Group, a non-denominational religious group which emphasized the importance of self-assessment and confession of one's sins. After another drinking binge and hospitalization, Wilson realized he had hit bottom and experienced a conversion: he realized that hitting bottom was the first step to lead him away from

[48] Frank Buchman, quoted in Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 30.

[49] Unlike most of the earlier religious groups that targeted their efforts at reform on poor or immigrant populations, the Oxford Group specifically reached out to relatively elite and powerful members of society. White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 128; Travis, *The Language of the Heart*, 31. See also Daniel Sack, "Reaching the 'Up-And-Outers': Sam Shoemaker and Modern Evangelicalism," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 64, no. 1 (March 1995): 37–56.

[50] Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Seattle: Glen Abbey Books, 1992), 126; Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 178.

[51] Anne Smith, personal journal, online transcript by Ralph Cova, *Hindsfoot Foundation*. Throughout Anne's journal there are many parallels to what would later become the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous. For example, on page 26 of her journal, Anne writes, "Oh God, manage me, because I cannot manage myself." This phrase is similar to Step One of AA in which alcoholics must admit, "our lives had become unmanageable." Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 52.

[52] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 178.

[53] Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God,: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City: Hazelden Educational Services, 1979), quoted in Annah Perch, "Stepping Stones (Bill and Lois Wilson House)," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), 2011, Section 8, pp. 16–17.

alcohol. Weeks later, upon reflection, Wilson was convinced that the root of this change rested on his encounter with Ebby Thacher, "when one alcoholic began to talk to another." He envisioned "a chain reaction among alcoholics, one carrying this message and these principles to [the] next."[54] Wilson believed it was now his role in life to serve and assist his fellow alcoholics in turning away from alcoholism.[55]

In early May 1935, Wilson traveled to Akron on a business trip; sober for several months but tempted to drink due to his failure to finalize a deal, he ended up across the lobby from the bar at the Mayflower Hotel. Fearing an imminent lapse to his sobriety if he entered the bar, Wilson chose instead to call a local minister who put him in touch with an Akron Oxford Group member, Henrietta Seiberling. As someone who was quite familiar with Bob Smith's struggles, Seiberling eagerly arranged for the two men to meet at her home the following day. At Anne's insistence, a reluctant and hung-over Smith agreed to go to Seiberling's to meet Wilson but he planned to stay only for fifteen minutes. Instead, the two met in Henrietta's home, the Gate Lodge at the Seiberling estate, for six hours that evening. Smith realized that their shared experience gave both men a common language for and understanding of alcoholism. Buoyed by the success of this initial meeting, Anne invited Wilson to spend the summer living at 855 Ardmore Avenue, with the belief that Wilson and Smith could mutually support each other in refraining from alcohol.

In June 1935, three weeks after meeting Wilson, Smith took the train east to Atlantic City, New Jersey, to attend the annual convention of the American Medical Association. Although he believed he could abstain from alcohol during his trip, he drank heavily until his return to Akron four days later. Three days after his return from the East, Smith was scheduled to perform a difficult operation at St. Thomas Hospital but due to his withdrawal he was experiencing delirium tremens. "Under the ministrations of his wife and Bill, Dr. Bob was brought to the edge of sobriety by the familiar process of tapering off. On June 10, 1935, Bill and Anne drove Dr. Bob to the hospital…In an act of charity, understood best by any alcoholic coming off a drink, Bill handed Bob a bottle of beer 'to steady his nerves so that he could hold the knife.'"[56] This would be Smith's last drink. After successfully completing the operation, Smith went around the hospital to make amends for the damage his alcoholism had caused.[57]

Firm in his commitment to his newfound sobriety, Robert, along with Bill and Anne, spent the remainder of the summer of 1935 in the Akron home hammering out the philosophy and process of what would eventually become Alcoholics Anonymous. For years, Smith had read and talked to everybody he thought knew something about alcoholism, but to no avail. But Wilson, Smith later recalled, was the first person "who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience."[58] Unlike Wilson, Smith never "had the 'hot flash' of spiritual conversion."[59] Instead, Smith and Wilson conversed at great length, with "hardly a night that we didn't sit up until two or three o'clock talking," Smith later recalled.[60] Through these conversations around the kitchen table of the Smiths' Akron home, Smith came to believe that he too could remain sober. He and Wilson also became increasingly convinced that the recovery they experienced could be shared with anyone who was willing to try. In their conversations, Bill, Robert, and Anne "read, studied, and discussed the Bible, the Oxford Group, Christian literature, and the Oxford Group program."[61] These daily rituals led the two men to explore what Smith later described as "the basic ideas [for AA] though not in terse and tangible form."[62] Although the

[54] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 64.
[55] Perch, "Stepping Stones (Bill and Lois Wilson House)", NHL Nomination Form, 17.
[56] Ibid., 18.
[57] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 179–180.
[58] Ibid., 180.
[59] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 140.
[60] Dick B., *Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 127.
[61] Ibid., 181.
[62] Dick B., *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous: A Design for Living that Works* (Maui, Hawaii: Paradise Research, 1998), 10.

origin story of Alcoholics Anonymous highlights several different sites across Akron, and although Robert Smith and Bill Wilson would not codify their program in *Alcoholics Anonymous* until 1939, the theoretical and practical foundations of AA were formed within the Smith home.

Recognizing the effectiveness of their early conversations, Smith and Wilson envisioned a program in which owning up to one's alcoholic identity was not a social stigma or moral weakness, but rather a first step toward recovery. By sharing their struggles with addiction and their path towards recovery, alcoholics would, as Wilson had done with Smith, reach out to prospective members and sustain the resolve of those already in the program. The fellowship of alcoholics served a practical purpose as well: in reaching out to still-suffering alcoholics and becoming their life-line to sobriety, members developed a tone of responsibility with one another, essentially creating a form of "insurance" against the temptation to drink.[63] In the hands of AA members, the personal experience of being an alcoholic, rather than the prognoses of the medical field or religious establishment, became the expertise that validated the methods AA put forward about the ailment and strategies for recovery.[64]

The foundation of AA's Twelve-Step program involved the transformation of weaknesses into strengths on several counts. The act of surrender provided empowerment for individual change; fellow alcoholics guided, rather than impeded, recovery, and returning to past wrongs worked towards healing. The Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions that followed them, placed the responsibility for sobriety on both individuals and the fellowship of alcoholics. After acknowledging that they were "powerless over alcohol" and surrendering to a "Power greater than ourselves," AA members—through the mutual support of the fellowship of alcoholics—would take stock of the damage alcoholism had caused in their lives and work to make restitution to others and to themselves. Because they defined alcoholism as "an allergy of the body and obsession of the will," the co-founders' approach to recovery involved attention to body, mind, and spirit.

"Welcome Home"

Even as the principles behind AA continued to form, Smith and Wilson set out to practice and refine their model of recovery. Besides being the "experimental laboratory" in which the two co-founders developed much of the program's philosophy, the Smith home also quickly became a site of healing—a "free refuge" of sorts—for alcoholics and their families.[65] As Anne noted in her journal, "our homes should be places where people can feel at liberty to come for help and inspiration."[66] In the early years of the program, the Smiths both hosted group meetings and housed recovering alcoholics at 855 Ardmore Avenue. In this sense, AA's foundational model grew out of the care that Robert and Anne Smith provided under their own roof.

Anne's welcoming spirit and careful management of scarce household resources provided a practical, but hospitable, grounding to these early efforts. In addition to engaging in conversations with her husband and Bill Wilson about the program's philosophy, Anne, who became known as the "Mother of AA," often embraced guests in her arms, prepared meals for them, and even moved her adolescent children out of their beds so that alcoholics would have a warm place to sleep.[67] As Wilson later recalled of the early gatherings in Akron, "Anne

[63] Jack Alexander, "Alcoholics Anonymous," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 1, 1941. He continued, presuming as was typical at the time, that AA members were male: "The more drinkers he succeeds in swinging into Alcoholics Anonymous, the greater his responsibility to the group becomes. He can't get drunk now without injuring the people who have proved themselves his best friends."

[64] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 35; White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 151.

[65] Alexander, "Alcoholics Anonymous."

[66] Dick Bob, *Anne Smith's Spiritual Workbook* (Seattle: Glen Abbey Books, 1992), 38.

[67] Bob, *Anne Smith's Spiritual Workbook*, 38.

made her home ready for us, so we had shelter over our heads. There was some expense for coffee, and Smith paid it. If Anne and Smith had not given these hospitable services, no meeting could have been held."[68]

In many ways, the Smith home functioned as a sort of halfway house. In addition to housing Wilson over the summer of 1935, the Smiths opened their home to those alcoholics and their families who needed a space to face their addiction. Robert and Anne converted their daughter's bedroom into a "Surrender Room," where alcoholics could kneel quietly and engage in self-surrender. Within the Smith home, recovering alcoholics would often be served a homemade "detox" cure of Karo Syrup, sauerkraut juice, and stewed tomatoes to help them manage their withdrawal symptoms.[69] In the meantime, Anne comforted and administered to the needs of the wives and families of detoxing alcoholics. Additionally, the couple hosted meetings throughout the Depression, scraping together just enough money to serve coffee, potato salad, milk, and bread to alcoholics and their families.[70]

The Smiths' Akron home fulfilled the tri-partite role of meeting house, laboratory of recovery practices, and refuge until 1939 when—with an estimated eighty people in attendance—the meetings moved to King School, a mile and a half from the Smith home. Robert and Anne's dedication to developing a set of practices to support sober living for alcoholics, their partnership with Bill Wilson, and their provision of a welcoming, lived-in space, were crucially important in establishing AA and nurturing it through its early years until their deaths.

The Smiths' commitment to reach out to fellow alcoholics and their families soon spilled out beyond the walls of their home. Through Bob Smith's efforts, Akron became the first site to integrate an AA model of recovery and hospital treatment in 1939. In this endeavor, Smith worked closely with Sister Ignatia, a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine order and the admitting officer at Akron's St. Thomas Hospital.[71] In the beginning, alcoholics were admitted under false pretenses because hospitals disliked these unruly, disruptive patients, but within a year, Smith and Sister Ignatia oversaw the dedication of an official alcoholics ward at St. Thomas. Their five-day model of treatment included a gradual detox, spiritual surrender, and visits with experienced AA members.[72] Eventually, AA negotiated with hospitals to grant members staff-level visiting privileges, so that experienced AA members might begin to talk with newly admitted alcoholics upon their arrival.[73] Over the course of a decade, Smith and Sister Ignatia treated almost five thousand patients free-of-charge.[74] As AA grew beyond the Smiths' house, the organization created social spaces of support, in which individuals could connect with one another. This reformation of community in an era when other social bonds seemed to be shifting—such as nuclear families, kinship networks, and the transformation of neighborhoods—was also an important underlying context to the success of AA's model for recovery.[75]

While Robert focused on ways to integrate hospital care into the recovery process, Anne began to form an important relationship with Lois Wilson, Bill Wilson's wife. Anne and Lois, of course, had much in common as wives of recovering alcoholics and each recognized the importance of treating not just alcoholics, but also their families. Over the course of more than a decade, the two women spent time together in Akron and in New York tirelessly attending to the needs of wives and family members of alcoholics. These early efforts led them to

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[68] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 141.

[69] Ernest Kurtz, personal communication, 14 October 2011. Kurtz is the author of *Not-God* and a noted historian of Alcoholics Anonymous. The same concoction is often described in tours of Dr. Bob's Home today.

[70] Nan Robertson, *Getting Better: Inside Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Morrow, 1988), 20.

[71] Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City: Hazelden Pittman Archive Press, 1992), 8–23, 89–91. A partnership like this with a Catholic hospital, let alone the myriad non-Christian, secular, or public sites in which AA eventually worked, would not have been possible had AA remained tied to the Oxford Group's squarely Protestant rhetoric.

[72] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 141–142; Darrah, *Sister Ignatia,* 110–116.

[73] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 140.

[74] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 7.

[75] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 162.

realize that wives of alcoholics often found life more difficult *after* their husbands achieved sobriety than it had been previously; this stemmed from the misconception that all of their problems would be solved once sobriety had been achieved.[76] Lois recalled Anne telling her: "You and I discovered that by living with this disease, we got as sick as our husbands. The problem is, not many wives realize that. That's why we have to help them."[77] After visiting each other's homes several times, Lois instituted the same recovery process that Anne had begun in her Akron home: gathering spouses together to talk about living with an alcoholic and finding coping mechanisms to help improve their lives. Although Anne would not survive long enough to see it through, the model that she and Lois developed to help families of alcoholics would later evolve into the Al-Anon program.

The Smiths had been married for thirty-four years when Anne died in 1949. Smith passed away a year later in November 1950. As Bill Wilson reflected during the organization's Twentieth Anniversary Convention in St. Louis, the constellation of "ministry" offered by Bob and Anne Smith, Sister Ignatia, and Akron's first groups had "set an example for the practice of AA's Twelve Steps that will remain for all time."[78]

In addition to the Twelve Steps framework, the personal stories of the co-founders continued to have relevance for AA. The inclusion of Smith's biography in the "Big Book" established his narrative of recovery as a confessional model for AA's membership. During AA meetings today, members take turns sharing their life stories while recounting the struggles they have encountered with addiction. This form of story sharing has its origins in the private conversations between Smith and Wilson. During the early days of AA, both Smith and Wilson also told and retold their stories of recovery to audiences across the country. These personal stories, which were included in the "Big Book," established a creation story that members of AA not only read about and heard but could also discuss during meetings. The biographical stories codified and disseminated by the two co-founders were, in fact, scripted narratives specifically designed to succinctly communicate the struggles of alcoholism and the benefits of their organization. Through this process of repetition and widespread circulation Robert Smith's and Bill Wilson's biographies cemented their revered status within the AA community.

A Model that Worked

When Wilson and Smith conceptualized the tenets of AA, they looked back on the successes and failures of past temperance societies, zealously avoiding traps that thrust other organizations into controversies, political allegiances, and negative public perceptions. Instead, they created a program that was accessible to a broad range of addiction sufferers, sustainable in the midst of adaptation, and replicable in a variety of social contexts and therapeutic settings. Over the course of the next few decades, AA would expand rapidly, both in terms of its membership and its national role in the realm of addiction treatment.

Shortly after its founding, Alcoholics Anonymous parted ways with the Oxford Group, but the older movement's principles of surrender, restitution, witnessing to one's experience, and working towards personal change in and through the fellowship of others were inscribed into the Twelve Steps and have remained vital to AA's program. Separating from the Oxford Group helped AA develop a broader movement specifically geared toward supporting the sustained recovery of alcoholics of all religious stripes; rather than requiring surrender to a Protestant understanding of God, the second step of AA called upon alcoholics to recognize a "power greater than ourselves."[79] Moreover, the Oxford Group's preference for public prominence and political involvement

[76] William G. Borchert, *The Lois Wilson Story: When Love is Not Enough* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Pittman Archives Press, 2005), 236–237.

[77] Borchert, *Lois Wilson Story*, 267.

[78] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 7.

[79] Ibid. Wilson explained the split as arising from a difference in purpose between the two groups: "The Oxford Group wanted to save the world, and I only wanted to save drunks." Quoted in White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 131.

set the two groups at odds as AA became increasingly dedicated to formalizing its commitment to the principle of anonymity and nonpartisanship.[80]

AA also countered the traditional view of excessive drinking as an individual's moral failing by adopting a particular version of the disease concept of alcoholism. Dr. William D. Silkworth of the Towns Hospital in New York had impressed upon Wilson that alcoholism was at once "an allergy of the body […] and an obsession of the mind."[81] In the physician's definition, an innate vulnerability to alcohol resulting from the allergy, rather than moral weakness or insufficient will, compelled alcoholics to drink; total and permanent abstinence from alcohol consumption was the only remedy to such a condition. For Smith, this version of the disease concept of alcoholism was the "only way to get across [the] *hopelessness*" of the condition; as a result, Silkworth's medical definition of alcoholism became enshrined in AA's "Big Book" and significantly influenced the modern theory of alcoholism as disease.[82]

Although originally intended as a means by which AA members entering the program could re-imagine their condition, this concept eventually gained traction outside AA circles. Indeed, one of AA's most lasting impacts has been to convince the public, through various forms of advocacy and education, that alcoholism is a disease serious enough to merit medical study and care. E. M. Jellinek, the Yale researcher who developed the foundational "Phases of Alcohol Addiction" concept in the 1940s based his research on data collected from a questionnaire distributed through AA's newsletter, *Grapevine.*[83] Although Jellinek based his assessment on an admittedly unscientific sample, the conclusions he derived from the self-reporting of AA members provided a foundational template for a medical, rather than moral, vision of alcoholism that alcoholics and those seeking to treat them still utilize.[84] In 1944, Marty Mann, one of the first women to attain sobriety through AA, founded the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (NCEA) which spearheaded a nationwide public education campaign to promote the singular idea that alcoholism is a disease that can be treated.[85]

A shrewd public relations strategist, Mann simplified the scientific concepts articulated by Jellinek and others for a general audience and coupled them with an optimistic insistence that alcoholics can recover and are worthy of help. Mann's use of her own life story and the role of AA in her sobriety in her speeches and fundraising efforts caused some confusion regarding the role of various organizations in the loosely configured alcoholism movement. Ultimately, this episode helped inspire the principles of anonymity as outlined in the Twelve Traditions of AA.[86] Mann's campaign reshaped American views of addictive drinking and of alcoholics; by the early 1960s, when Mann appeared on the cover of *Readers' Digest* magazine, nearly two-thirds of the American public believed that alcoholism was a disease, up from only twenty percent in the 1940s.[87]

As AA grew, the centerpiece of the program—a personal alcoholic-to-alcoholic support mechanism—came to influence the care provided to alcoholics in many other settings. The group relied on communication networks forged not just among alcoholics but also clergymen, doctors, employers, and friends—what Bill Wilson called

[80] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 131.
[81] Ibid., 141.
[82] Smith, quoted in Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 33–35.
[83] Joseph W. Schneider, "Deviant Drinking as Disease: Alcoholism as a Social Accomplishment," *Social Problems* 25, no. 4 (April 1978): 361–372.
[84] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 39–40.
[85] M. Mann, "Formation of a National Committee for Education on Alcoholism," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 5, no. 2 (1944).
[86] Sally Brown and David R. Brown, *A Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann: The First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Information & Educational Services, 2001), especially ch. 18, "Rocking the Boat." See also, Bruce H. Johnson, "The Alcoholism Movement in America: A Study in Cultural Innovation" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1973).
[87] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 43.

"the good will of the public at large"—to spread and undertake the mission of AA.[88] In the 1940s, AA approached groups like the Salvation Army, the few remaining Keeley Institutes, and other inebriety facilities to integrate the Twelve Steps into their existing patterns of treatment.[89]

The tireless advocacy of AA members also transformed the care alcoholics received within hospitals. Overcrowded post-Depression hospitals were originally loath to accept alcoholics, viewing them as moral degenerates who seldom paid medical bills and often created behavioral problems. But beginning in 1939 with Robert Smith and Sister Ignatia's successful alcoholic ward at St. Thomas Hospital, AA members, often freshly recovered from their own addiction, almost single-handedly convinced hospitals in several major cities to create new alcoholic wards. When hospital administrators complained about accepting unruly alcoholics, local AA members responded by taking personal and financial responsibility for admitted drunks, giving physicians specific guidelines on the admission, care, and release of recovering patients, and monitoring the overall effectiveness of the new wards. The model worked. By 1957 AA had established groups in 265 hospitals and over 300 prisons.[90]

Where hospital or other institutional services were not available, AA members worked to create new ones. From the 1940s to the 1960s, local groups and individual members advocated for, or established, various programs to serve alcoholics who could not be admitted to local hospitals. By sitting on state or local boards that organized new addiction services or financing retreat centers that would give alcoholics an isolated space in which to work toward sobriety, AA members filled important gaps in available care for these addicts.[91]

AA's early efforts did not go unnoticed. The American Public Health Association presented the organization with the Lasker Award in 1951, "in recognition of its unique and highly successful approach to that age-old public health and social problem, alcoholism… In emphasizing alcoholism as an illness, the social stigma associated with this condition is being blotted out."[92] Indeed, says scholar William White, "from 1935 to 1975 AA existed almost unchallenged as the mutual-aid society for recovered alcoholics."[93]

Across its first four decades, AA and its members exerted increasing influence over the therapeutic and social response to alcoholism in America. The "Minnesota Model," a multidisciplinary approach that became the standard method utilized and replicated internationally by alcoholism treatment professionals in the 1950s and 60s, had strong roots in AA practice. By the 1980s, the nation's largest healthcare institution, the Veterans Health Administration, was treating its alcoholic patients with an AA-style inpatient program. Even the alternatives to Alcoholics Anonymous that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s focused primarily on applying the AA model more effectively to populations not traditionally associated with the organization, such as women and the non-religious.[94]

AA's promotion of both the disease concept of alcoholism and the Twelve Steps as a path to sobriety resulted in the explosion of addiction treatment programs in 1960s and 1970s America and led to increased employment for physicians specializing in addiction medicine. Following the "Minnesota Model" that used former alcoholics as counselors, the field of addiction treatment turned to recovered alcoholics, many of them AA members, to staff new agencies. These AA members significantly helped shape AA's influence on the burgeoning field of addiction and helped cement AA's relationship with treatment agencies. Growing awareness about the nature of

[88] Wilson[Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 34–35, 197.
[89] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 74–75, 61–62.
[90] Ibid., 167–170.
[91] Ibid., *Slaying the Dragon*, 171–172.
[92] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 571.
[93] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 279.
[94] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 150–151; White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 272, 279–80.

alcoholism also expanded the scope of addiction services in the last decades of the twentieth century to include early intervention, risk reduction for alcoholics, and abuse prevention as well as campaigns against alcohol-related concerns like drunken driving, domestic violence, and child neglect.[95]

Beyond Akron

AA transformed the world of addiction treatment in the United States, but it has also had a remarkably broad presence in American culture. Soon after the initial development of AA in 1935, print culture, radio, films, and later television captured and reshaped ideas about alcoholism and AA. As preeminent AA historian Ernest Kurtz claims, the organization has become "as American as baseball, apple pie, hot dogs and the Fourth of July."[96] AA grew from an informal organization based in Dr. Bob's Home in Akron, Ohio, to a global network that has helped millions achieve sobriety in tandem with the organization's increasing visibility within the larger arena of public culture. At the same time, the diffusion of AA's philosophy beyond its members to the wider American public also challenged the organization's control over its foundational principles and message.[97] Partially due to this widespread media attention, AA membership has continued to climb; in numbers and influence, the organization stands as nothing less than the "largest, most enduring mutual-aid society of recovered alcoholics in human history."[98]

In its first few years, AA remained grounded in Smith and Wilson's own networks in Akron and New York City; in 1937, for example, the two co-founders counted forty-five members in the organization.[99] The next year, philanthropist John D. Rockefeller gave Alcoholics Anonymous a small financial boost when he deposited $5,000 in a bank account for organizational costs. That year, Ohioans read a series of articles on AA in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* during October and November, but the wider American public first heard about the organization from Gabriel Heatter's nationally broadcast "We The People" radio show. On the April 25, 1939 broadcast, Heatter interviewed program member Morgan R. about his experiences with alcoholism and AA.[100]

The explosion in membership that followed the publication of an article about AA in the *Saturday Evening Post* demonstrated the power that national media exposure could have in helping the organization to spread outward from its Akron roots. Written by Jack Alexander, a skeptical reporter who became convinced of the organization's value after meeting Bill Wilson and Robert Smith, the 1941 *Post* article boosted AA membership from 2,000 to 8,000 in a matter of ten months.

According to Wilson, printed publications produced on an organizational level helped secure the alcoholics-centered nature of AA, even as the fellowship seeped into popular consciousness and developed a global following.[101] While there had been some debate between 1935 and 1939 as to whether AA should use printed materials or rely primarily on oral communication, Smith and Wilson had ultimately opted for the use of print media, in the form of publications.[102] This decision allowed the organization to control its messages about addiction and recovery, amidst many increasing and competing cultural representations, through AA-sanctioned

[95] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 46–48.
[96] Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Educational Services, 1979).
[97] Robin Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945–1962: the Party Ends for the 'Wet Generations,'" *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 50, no. 4 (1989): 368–383, 370.
[98] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 162.
[99] Klaus Mäkelä, *Alcoholics Anonymous As a Mutual-Help Movement: A Study in Eight Societies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21.
[100] As recounted in Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1985), 174–175.
[101] See Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 141.
[102] Ibid., 119.

literature. The "Big Book," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, was first published in 1939, with 4,730 copies printed.[103] By 1945, AA had begun publishing *Grapevine*, the newsletter that conveyed the majority of its organizational literature. The emergence of Conference Approved Literature (CAL) maintained AA's authority over the content of its foundational principles and origin story as the organization grew.[104] The fellowship reported having around 15,000 members in 1945, and AA held its first European meeting in Dublin, Ireland, the following year.[105]

Several other developments in the early 1950s further solidified AA's expansion. The first International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous took place in Cleveland in 1950; AA groups in Cleveland had grown directly out of the early meetings the Smiths hosted. Drawing on her friendship with Anne Smith, Lois Wilson founded Al-Anon Family Groups for the family members of alcoholics a year later. The founding of Narcotics Anonymous during this period also led to the widespread application of the Twelve Steps to other types of addictions.[106] Additionally, the replacement of the original Alcoholic Foundation with AA's General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1954 signaled the organization's increasing maturity and institutionalization. During the crucial decade of the 1950s, AA established a permanent and very visible presence in American society.

In terms of its membership, the organization experienced an eighteen-fold increase from 1953 to 1990, with most of the growth occurring in places outside the United States and Canada. The organization's foundational commitment to make the path to sobriety available to anyone willing to try proved critical in this expansion. By 1955, an AA conference report noted, "headquarters assumed responsibility for printing 500 copies of a Spanish edition of the first section of the Big Book which had originally been translated and mimeographed privately." This move to reach out to Spanish-speaking groups demonstrated the organization's heightened awareness of and willingness to meet the rising demand for AA among non-English speakers.[107]

AA visibility in popular culture increased in the 1950s as well, as representations of alcoholics and AA-style mutual aid societies appeared in several mainstream films.[108] Indeed, films have been one of the primary ways AA has influenced American culture, particularly during the period 1945 to 1962.[109] As the organization itself notes, "In the wake of the success of 'The Lost Weekend'—the Oscar-winning 1945 film about a struggling alcoholic—three Hollywood Studios offer[ed] AA as much as $100,000 for the rights to the Fellowship's story. The Alcoholic Foundation, fearing such films would amount to a violation of privacy, refuse[d] the offers on behalf of AA members."[110] Nonetheless, while AA as an organization has never had an explicit role in the production of mainstream films, the principles of AA have been represented and conveyed to a wider audience through film.[111]

Even as AA's growth slowed in the 1960s and 1970s, films about AA and alcoholism continued to be produced. Although some of these motion pictures remained less true to AA's ideals of recovery, they signified the

[103] Ibid., 275.

[104] See Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 140–141.

[105] Mäkelä, *Alcoholics Anonymous As a Mutual-Help Movement*, 22; Shane Butler and Tony Jordan, "Alcoholics Anonymous in Ireland: AA's First European Experience," *Addiction* 102, no. 6 (June 2007); William L. White, "Addiction Recovery Mutual Aid Groups: An Enduring International Phenomenon," *Addiction* 99, no. 5 (May 2004).

[106] In 1991, a reported 260 Twelve-Step programs modeled after AA but applied to other addictions, existed. Mäkelä, *Alcoholics Anonymous As a Mutual-Help Movement*, 216.

[107] "Conference Report of 1955" (page 17) as transcribed in Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 276.

[108] Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945–1962."

[109] See Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945–1962."

[110] Alcoholics Anonymous, "AA Timeline," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, accessed October 28, 2011, https://www.aa.org/aa-timeline.

[111] Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945–1962," 371. For example, the 1958 film *The Voice in the Mirror* remains true to AA's spiritual ideals and fellowship.

pervasive presence AA and alcoholism had developed in American culture. For example, *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962) features little mention of the spiritual connotations of AA. Yet the film does assert the power of "drunks helping drunks" by linking the main character's failure to attain sobriety to "her inability to ask for help from others."[112] Overall, *Days of Wine and Roses* upheld Alcoholics Anonymous as the true path to sobriety. On the other hand, many films dealing with addiction have played up the idea of individualism and will power of characters struggling with alcoholism, distorting the notions of fellowship and self-surrender so central to AA's model.

Despite AA's lack of official religious affiliation, many faith communities have used the organization's model to initiate or reformulate their own involvement in social and health concerns. Although many religious organizations, particularly the Salvation Army and urban rescue missions, had been ministering to alcoholics since the late nineteenth century, AA's approach to alcoholism and recovery has influenced Catholic and Protestant perspectives on and responses to addiction.[113] Clergy members were active in the early years of the Yale Summer School of Alcoholic Studies program; different religious bodies have formed theologically based groups to act as a complement to the AA fellowship; and religious thinkers have assessed how AA's model might be applied to faith-based practices.[114] On the other hand, AA's decoupling of spirituality and religious doctrine has made room for a hybrid of medical and spiritual approaches and expertise in addiction treatment. Even so, public debate continues over the dynamic between spirituality and more explicit religious practices in Alcoholics Anonymous and has perhaps intensified as the 12 Steps have become incorporated into recovery programs in public institutions like prisons.[115]

AA membership again underwent a distinct uptick in the last two decades of the twentieth century, possibly due to its increased ties with professional addiction treatment institutions. Today, AA boasts nearly 2 million members and more than 106,000 local groups in 150 countries. AA's ability to spread across the globe is due in part to its being flexible enough to adjust to a variety of cultures.[116] Indeed, a study of AA fellowship among Zapotec-speaking Mexicans was found to contain all essential AA attributes and, though being performed in a drastically distinct environment, was able to effectively address alcoholism, signaling AA's ability to operate in cross-cultural contexts.[117] In the United States, a full 13 percent of adults reported having attended an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at some point in their lives.[118] Studies have also indicated that AA fellowship has been effective with alcoholics from every major racial, cultural, and socioeconomic group.[119] A recent bibliography counted almost 3,000 books, dissertations, and theses written on the organization, while co-

[112] Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945–1962," 374.

[113] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 71–78. The Catholic Church in America, for instance, founded the National Clergy Council on Alcoholism (NCCA) in 1949 to provide guidance and education to the church on substance abuse. By 1977, their official stance on alcoholism mirrored that of AA: "We believe that alcoholism is an addictive disease, manifesting itself as a three-fold illness of body, mind and spirit.… We especially believe that basic to any treatment modality is a continuing, daily program of spiritual recovery." White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 190–191; for the quote, see NCCA [letter to the editor], *Commonweal*, January 21, 1977, 63.

[114] White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 190; T. N. Tiemeyer, "What Yale Teaches about Alcohol," *Christian Century*, September 29, 1948, 1004–1005; Joseph H. Fichter, "Catholics and Temperance," *Commonweal*, September 24, 1976, 626. See, for instance, the inclusion of the Big Book on a mainline Christian periodical's recent book list on the topic of evangelism. George Hunter, "Essential Books: Evangelism," *Christian Century*, April 20, 2011.

[115] In 2007, Ricky Inouye, a Buddhist drug offender, brought suit against the State of Hawaii, arguing that his First Amendment rights had been violated when the state mandated he attend a program based on AA. The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Inouye's favor.

[116] See for example, Alcoholics Anonymous, "AA for the Native North American," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, accessed December 9, 2011, https://www.aa.org/aa-native-north-american.

[117] Livingston D. Sutro, "Alcoholics Anonymous in a Mexican Peasant-Indian Village," *Human Organization* 48, no. 2 (1989): 180–186.

[118] Robin Room and Thomas Greenfield, "Alcoholics Anonymous, Other 12-Step Movements and Psychotherapy in the US Population," *Addiction* 88, no. 4 (April 1993): 555–562.

[119] Barry Leach et al., "Dimensions of Alcoholics Anonymous: 1935–1965," *Substance Use & Misuse* 4, no. 4 (1969): 507–541.

founder Bill Wilson was recognized by both *Time* and *Life* magazines as one of the most important people of the twentieth century.[120] The "Big Book," which drew much of its foundational content from conversations and work that happened in the Smith's home, is one of the one hundred bestselling books of all time. In the year 2000 alone, close to one million copies of *Alcoholics Anonymous* were distributed worldwide.[121] Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Twelve-Step culture that has expanded from it, have become embedded enough in American popular culture to receive comedic treatment on hit shows like NBC's *Seinfeld*.[122] What is more, remnants of the "language of the heart," which Smith and Wilson developed in Akron, have even infused the uplifting messages of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.[123]

As these examples illustrate, the impact of AA on American society and culture has been complex. Along with the prevalence of AA as an organization and process, its message has been diffused through popular culture. Although these depictions have at times misrepresented the fellowship, thus contributing to ambivalence and confusion from the wider American public, they also testify to the widespread influence of the program. Together, official organizational literature, a variety of media portrayals, and the plethora of Twelve-Step programs that have grown out of AA have reshaped American views of alcoholics and of addiction more generally.

Other Associated Properties

The intense discussions between Bill Wilson, Bob Smith, and Anne Smith that took place at 855 Ardmore Avenue during the summer of 1935 laid the groundwork for Alcoholics Anonymous. Given this history and the strong integrity of that structure, Dr. Bob's Home is the best site to represent the origin of Alcoholics Anonymous and the role of Robert and Anne Smith in the founding of the AA program. Both Anne and Bob were very involved in the growth and development of AA in the years between its founding in 1935 and their deaths in 1949 and 1950, respectively. Thus, the period of significance is from 1935 to 1950.

Other Akron properties set the stage for the friendship between Bob Smith and Bill Wilson, as well as for early phases of the fellowship's growth. Several properties in New York also illustrate the later expansion of the fellowship.

Gate Lodge at Stan Hywet Hall, Akron, Ohio

Bill Wilson and Robert Smith met for the first time at the encouragement of Henrietta Seiberling and Anne Smith. Mrs. Seiberling, an Oxford Group member, hosted the meeting at her residence, the "Gate Lodge" at Stan Hywet Hall on the grounds of the Frank Seiberling family estate. Stan Hywet Hall was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1981 for its outstanding Tudor Revival main house and for its association with Seiberling, founder of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Today, the Gate Lodge is interpreted as a memorial to the initial conversation between Wilson and Smith and the history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Although the initial meeting between Wilson and Smith occurred here, the more in-depth conversations that led to the creation and development of AA and the Twelve Steps were held at the Smiths' house.

[120] White, William L. and Ernest Kurtz. "Twelve Defining Moments in the History of Alcoholics Anonymous"; "100 Persons of the Century," *Time*, June 14, 1999; "AA's Big Book Celebrates 70 Years," *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 11, 2009.
[121] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 277.
[122] See *Seinfeld*, Season 3, episode 12 (1991) and Season 9, episode 9 (1997).
[123] Travis, *Language of the Heart*, 232–235.

The Mayflower Hotel, Akron, Ohio
The Mayflower Hotel opened in 1931 as Akron's premiere hotel. In 1973, after several changes in ownership, the hotel was refurbished as a subsidized housing complex for low-income and elderly residents. The site maintains a replica of the 1935 telephone and church directory in the lobby used by Bill Wilson.

Although this is the location of Bill Wilson's fateful decision to call and seek help rather than obtain a drink at the bar, the Mayflower Hotel lacks both a strong and prolonged association with the founding and continued growth of Alcoholics Anonymous. The idea for AA and its subsequent creation and development took place at Bob Smith's house. In addition, due to significant alterations in both the design and purpose of the building, the site does not meet the high degree of integrity that is required for National Historic Landmark status.

St. Thomas Hospital, Akron, Ohio
As a practicing physician, Robert Smith had access to St. Thomas, an Akron area hospital. After he achieved sobriety, he hoped to use facilities there to help other alcoholics. In this period, hospitals in Akron, much like those in other parts of the country, did not admit alcoholics for care because they did not view alcoholism as a legitimate medical complaint. With the help of Sister Ignatia, Smith was able to facilitate the admission of alcoholics under a variety of diagnoses. Sister Ignatia created an alcoholics ward, which was novel in its open partnership with the evolving AA fellowship and which served as a model for the incorporation of the Twelve-Step program into institutional care for addicts.

The hospital continued to grow and change from the 1950s to the 1970s, adding new buildings and departments. It ceased to function as a Catholic hospital when an independent board took over control in the 1980s, and in the mid-1990s St. Thomas merged with the Akron City Hospital to form the Summa Health System. Today, the hospital chapel includes interpretive material on Sister Ignatia's life story and the role she and Smith played in providing medical care to alcoholics in Akron. While St. Thomas Hospital was an important part of the expansion of AA and its contribution to medical care of alcoholics, it lacks the historical integrity and feeling of Dr. Bob's Home.

The King School, 805 Memorial Parkway, Akron, Ohio
With meetings of up to eighty people filling Robert and Anne's home in AA's first years, an alternative meeting space became necessary. Although the King School became the principal meeting space for AA's Akron Number One beginning in January 1940, this property lacks a strong association with the formation of AA. Dr. Bob's Home witnessed the founding and continued development of AA and the role of Robert and Anne Smith in sustaining that growth from its early years until the Smith's deaths. Although the building is currently vacant, deteriorating, and pending either demolition or renovation which would impact the integrity of the building, the group continues to refer to itself as the King School Group, demonstrating the importance of this site in the history of AA.

Stepping Stones (Bill and Lois Wilson House), 62 Oak Road, Katonah, New York
Stepping Stones is the former home of Bill Wilson and his wife Lois from 1941 to 1988, and the site where Wilson developed the Twelve-Step program, eventually steering AA into an international organization. It was here that Lois Wilson founded Al-Anon Family Groups, which continues today as a support network for family members of recovering alcoholics. Additionally, Bill and Lois welcomed many guests, both distinguished and anonymous, into their home throughout their lives.

Stepping Stones, which has been nominated for NHL designation, is best understood as a complementary site to Dr. Bob's Home. The fellowship grew out of a partnership, which is represented by the designation of both Dr. Bob's Home and Stepping Stones. Dr. Bob's Home conveys the humble and intimate origins of the fellowship,

with a period of significance focusing on the years 1935 to 1950. Stepping Stones reflects the maturity and continued growth of the AA program, as Bill Wilson emerged as its public voice and leader.

182 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York
This townhouse was the childhood home of Lois Wilson and was where the Wilsons lived part of their married life. Here Wilson spent the worst years of his drinking as he underwent treatment for his addiction at the Charles B. Towns Hospital. The home at Clinton Street, like the Smith home in Akron, underscores the belief that alcoholism affects families as well as the individual sufferer.

After the initial formulation of AA's tenets during the summer of 1935 in Akron, Wilson returned to New York where he and Lois began to hold weekly meetings of their own. Bill and Lois Wilson adopted a similar model of inviting struggling alcoholics into their home. As part of this effort, Anne Smith visited the Wilson home to cooperate with Lois in administering to wives and families of alcoholics.

In 1939, the Wilsons were forced to leave the property after it was foreclosed. Though important to Bill Wilson and Lois and the expansion of AA, the house was not central to the crystallization of the fellowship and codification of AA's principles and practices. Currently, the property is privately owned and lacks any official association with AA.

John B. Gough House, 215 Main St., Boylston, Massachusetts
The John B. Gough House in Boylston, Massachusetts, was home to the internationally known nineteenth-century social reformer John Bartholomew Gough from 1848 to 1886. An English immigrant to New York, Gough was an unemployed drunk when he first attended a temperance meeting in 1842. During his public confession of alcoholism at that meeting, Gough discovered his gift for oratory after delivering a moving personal confession "in a manner so touching that the great audience was overwhelmed with emotion." After pledging to give up drinking, Gough spent the rest of his life traveling across the country as a wildly popular temperance lecturer, preaching abstinence from alcohol to over 9 million people, by his own estimate. Upon his death, *The New York Times* described Gough as possibly the period's best-known speaker in the United States and Great Britain.

Although AA's emphasis on public confession of alcoholism seems to echo Gough's speeches, Gough rose to fame as a temperance advocate who encouraged individuals to swear off drinking based on the premise that alcoholism was an individual moral weakness. In crafting and promoting AA's disease concept of alcoholism and the Twelve Steps, Robert Smith and Bill Wilson challenged and rejected this view of alcoholism. The Gough House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974.

New York State Inebriate Asylum, 425 Robinson St., Binghamton, New York
The massive New York State Inebriate Asylum in Binghamton, New York, was the first medical facility in the United States designed and built specifically to treat "inebriates," people whose excessive drinking could be understood as a form of disease. The founding director, Dr. Joseph Edward Turner, was recognized as a leading figure among physicians who developed a medical specialty in the treatment of inebriety. Built in phases from 1857 to 1866 in Gothic Revival style, the facility followed the "Kirkbride Plan," an architectural layout that reinforced the classification of patients according to the most up-to-date medical concepts.

The allotment of considerable resources to medical treatment for inebriates in the midst of growing temperance sentiment shows that Americans have long held conflicting views of problem drinkers. Other inebriate asylums were constructed throughout the country in subsequent decades. Most, however, closed during Prohibition (1920 to 1933) or were converted to insane asylums. By the time of the founding of AA in the mid-1930s, the hope that facilities such as the New York State Inebriate Asylum could solve the problem of alcoholism was long gone. The structure was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1997.

Carry Nation House, 211 W. Fowler Ave., Medicine Lodge, Kansas

A well-known temperance figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Carry Nation (1846-1911) gained notoriety through her "hatchetation" crusade to close saloons in Kansas and throughout the country. Dismissed as an extremist at the time, even by other prohibition advocates, Nation was frequently caricatured as a symbol of the excesses of the temperance campaign. Like the founders of AA decades later, Nation's efforts arose from her own life experience: she was widowed at a young age when her husband died of alcohol-related causes. Her campaign to eliminate saloons should be understood within the context of the "temperance paradigm," which blamed the substance of liquor itself for alcohol-related problems.

By the time Bob Smith and Bill Wilson met in the 1930s, the cultural, political, and medical environment surrounding alcohol was much different. As a result, the Smith and Wilson families formulated a therapeutic regime that addressed the urge to drink (as opposed to the simple banning of alcohol). Nation's house in Medicine Lodge, Kansas, where she lived from 1889 to 1902, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976 and is operated as a museum under the auspices of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

Conclusion

Alcoholics Anonymous redefined the understanding of and approaches to alcoholism on a global scale. The Twelve Steps is widely viewed as a successful means of treating alcoholism and the program is a central feature of the services provided to alcoholics in hospitals and other settings. The story of AA began in Dr. Bob's Home. Beginning in the summer of 1935, two recovering alcoholics devised a recovery program that relied on mutual support to attain sobriety. Convinced that their model might serve as an inspiration for others to achieve permanent sobriety, the two co-founders worked tirelessly in the years that followed to codify and enact the principles that had been first discussed under the roof of the Smith home.

From the intimate conversations around the kitchen table to the use of the Smiths' house as the initial meeting space of the fledgling fellowship, Dr. Bob's Home is central to understanding the national importance of AA. In the meeting of Wilson and Smith, the means and setting through which ideas about alcoholism and recovery could be conveyed underwent a transformation. Instead of a professional delivering a medical diagnosis to a patient or providing spiritual wisdom to their penitent, one alcoholic, "in the kinship of common suffering," now shared his or her personal experience and trials with another in the quiet of a private setting.[124] This simple formula, combined with several early decisions about the program's structure, enabled Alcoholics Anonymous to achieve a degree of longevity and effectiveness unmatched by previous efforts to address alcoholism.

Dr. Bob's Home today still functions as an emotional anchor for AA and its supporters. Its Annual Founders' Day celebrations bring thousands of visitors to Akron and to the house on Ardmore Avenue to see where Bill Wilson, Bob Smith, and Anne Smith first held their chats. Visitors often go upstairs to the surrender room where early fellowship members also confessed their alcoholism, and to commemorate the modest beginnings of what has become a global movement. In its role as the foundation site of Alcoholics Anonymous and in its importance throughout the initial years of AA, the Dr. Robert and Anne Smith House is the "home" for a worldwide membership.

[124] Wilson [Bill Wilson], *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 59.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register. NR# 85003411 Listed: October 31, 1985
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	**Zone**	**Easting**	**Northing**
	17	453900	4549340

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property consists of Lot 44 of the Bloomfield Allotment of the City of Akron, Ohio, minus the northern 40 feet.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes the building and acreage that have historically been known as Dr. Bob's Home and which maintain high integrity.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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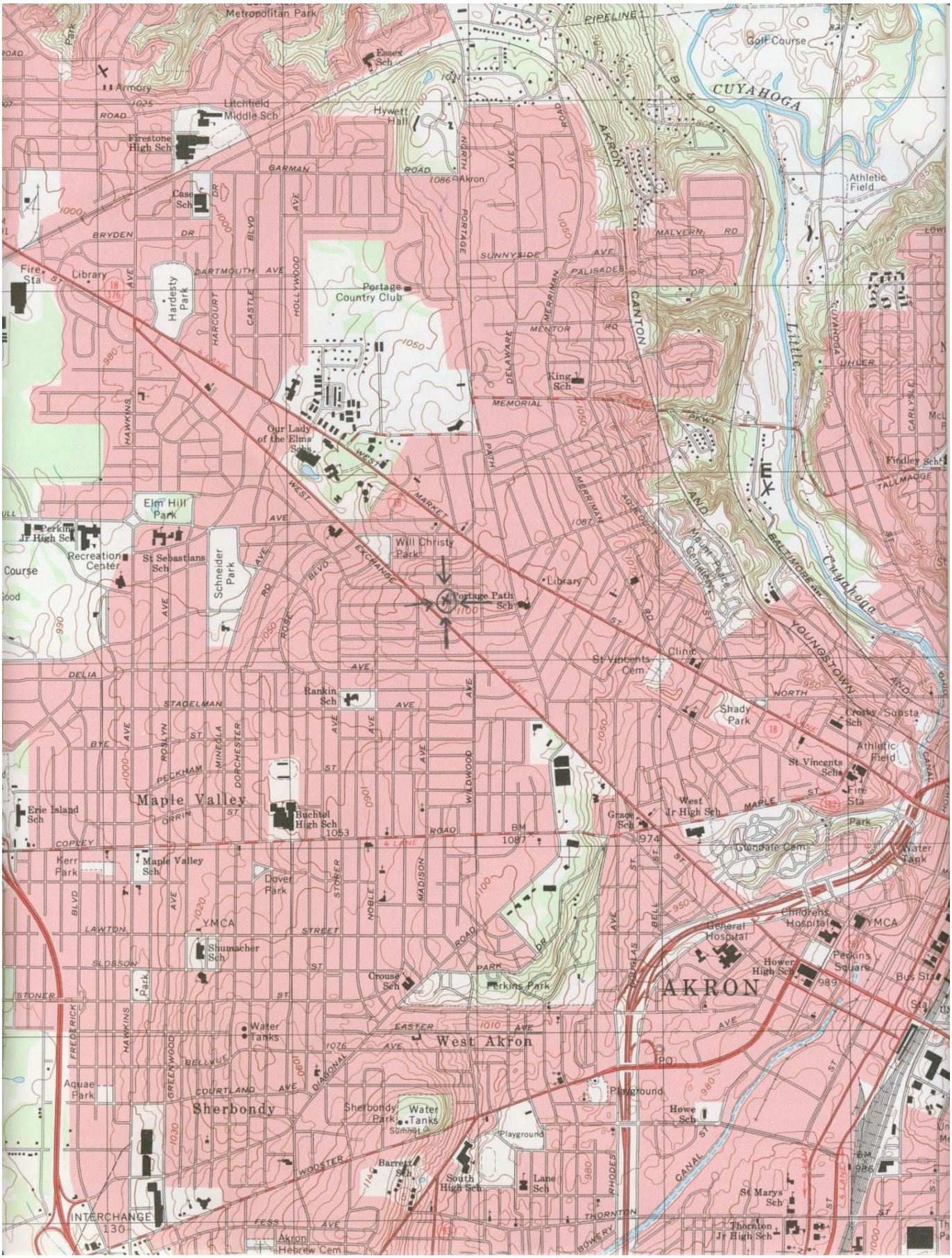
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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
October 16, 2012


Metropolitan Park
Armory
Litchfield Middle Sch
Firestone High Sch
Essex Sch
Hywett Hall
Akron
Golf Course
CUYAHOGA
Athletic Field
Case Sch
Fire Sta
Library
Hardesty Park
Portage Country Club
King Sch
Our Lady of the Elms Schs
Elm Hill Park
Perkins Jr High Sch
Recreation Center
St Sebastians Sch
Schneider Park
Will Christy Park
Portage Path Sch
Library
Findley Sch
Clinic
St Vincents Cem
Rankin Sch
Shady Park
Crosby Supsta
St Vincents Sch
Fire Sta
Maple Valley
Erie Island Sch
Buchtel High Sch
Grace Sch
West Jr High Sch
Glendale Cem
Water Tank
Kerr Park
Maple Valley Sch
Dover Park
YMCA
Childrens Hospital
General Hospital
Shumacher Sch
Crouse Sch
Perkins Park
Hower High Sch
Perkins Square
AKRON
Water Tanks
West Akron
Aquae Park
Sherbondy
Sherbondy Park
Water Tanks
Playground
Howe Sch
Barrett Sch
South High Sch
Lane Sch
St Marys Sch
Thornton Jr High Sch
INTERCHANGE 130
Akron Hebrew Cem



South front façade (left) and east side (right)
Akron, Ohio
Photo by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011



West elevation



Rear (north) elevation

Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011



East elevation (notice garage and bay window)
Akron, Ohio
Photo by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011



Rear porch and north elevation, camera facing southeast
Akron, Ohio
Photo by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011



Living room, with staircase and gas fireplace
Akron, Ohio
Photo by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011



Living room and front door (above)
Close-up of entrance to dining room (below)
Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011





Kitchen with table, taken between dining room entrance and entrance to basement stairway (above)
Rear of kitchen, door leads to back porch (below)
Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011





Kitchen, with sink and refrigerator (above)
Second-Floor Bathroom (below)
Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011





Bob and Anne Smith's bedroom (above)
Smitty's" bedroom, where alcoholics frequently stayed while in the care of Robert and Anne (below)
Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011





Sue's bedroom (original surrender room) (above & below)
Akron, Ohio
Photos by Joseph Cialdella and Kate Silbert, Fall 2011

