

How A.A. Made Its Way to Santa Fe, and What Happened Then

(This history was compiled by Jim L., District 2, Area 46 Archivist, based on a similar history written by Dennis M. in 1992.)

In 1941, Dr. Miles N. from Kansas City, Kansas, was in trouble. He had been drinking uncontrollably for over two years and was in a prison psychiatric unit. The judge was considering sending him to the state mental hospital. The doctor's wife brought him the Jack Alexander article, "Alcoholics Anonymous," which had just been published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and Dr. N. was struck sober. After he convinced the judge to let him return home to help other drunks, he started trolling skid row for prospects. Within a year, he opened a hospital for alcoholics in Kansas City. Over the next decades, Dr. N. sobered up hundreds and maybe thousands of people. Bill W. described him as "a prodigious A.A. worker and a national authority on the chemistry of drunks" (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, page 95).

Dr. N. often vacationed at a Santa Fe, New Mexico, resort called La Posada de Santa Fe. On a visit there in April 1946, his nephew, a local lawyer, told him about a man with a serious drinking problem. The man in question was Art S., a well-connected but very drunk accountant, who was living in his office in the building in which Dr. N.'s nephew worked. His wife had divorced him, and he could afford nowhere else to live. His accounting assistant kept him supplied with alcohol, and he would send out for food. Others working in the building considered calling the health department.

Art responded to a knock on his door. Dr. N. walked in and said, "Understand you're having a little trouble with alcohol." Then he told Art his own story and offered to take him back to La Posada to get sober. After some hesitation, Art agreed. Dr. N. detoxed him with the same recipe he used in Kansas City: two ounces of whiskey in four ounces of water every three hours for five doses, followed by the same every six hours for three doses, alternated with one teaspoon of salt in a glass of water every three hours between the diluted glasses of whiskey. It worked.

In the meantime, Dr. N. had somehow convinced Lenna, Art's ex-wife, to let Art move back in with her. Even though the divorce had been final since January, she let Art move into the front of the apartment. About six months later, they were remarried. Lenna was to join A.A. in 1948.

Before Dr. N. went home to Kansas City a few days after Easter, he told Art: "You will never need another drink the rest of your life. If you want to stay sober, you must get into

A.A. and *work at it*, and I really mean work at it!" Dr. N. became Art's first sponsor.

Art came together with three other alcoholics to form the Santa Fe Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, now known as the Downtown Group, in the spring of 1946.

As soon as it formed, the group, which grew to 30 members, became very active in Twelfth Step work. Numerous drunks were detoxed, using Dr. N.'s method. The group helped start other groups in Española, Las Vegas, Raton, and Taos. Soon after its founding, the group published a Spanish translation of a booklet from the A.A.s in Salt Lake City, "Who, me?" The booklet went on to be distributed in the thousands, mainly to Los Angeles and Southern California.

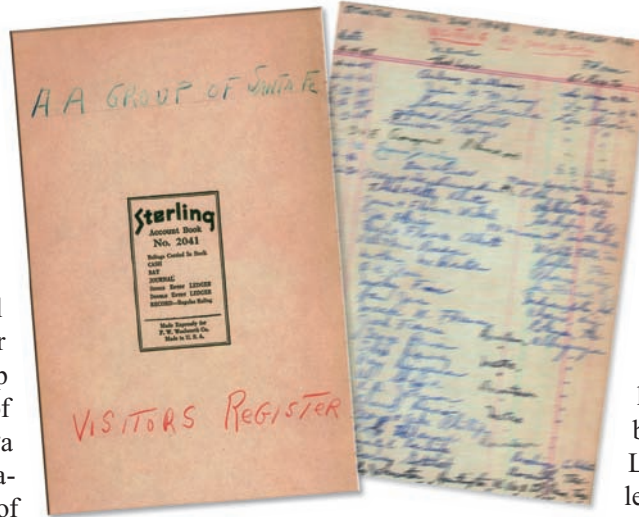
In 1947, with the cooperation of the warden of the state penitentiary, the Santa Fe Group began to take meetings to inmates. Soon, the inmates had formed their own A.A. group, called the Sundial Group, which for some time proudly called itself the first such group in A.A.

Also in 1947, Art and other New Mexico A.A. members successfully lobbied the state legislature to form and fund the New Mexico Commission on Alcoholism. The Commission was charged with studying the problem of alcoholism, including methods and facilities available for the care, custody and treatment of "persons addicted to the intemperate use of spirits or intoxicating liquids."

Until the mid-1960s, the two meetings a week of the Santa Fe Group were the only show in town. Then another group was formed. Still, by the late 1960s, there were only four meetings a week in the city. The 1980s, though, saw the rapid development of many new groups in Santa Fe. A men's group and a women's group had formed by 1981. In 1981 or 1982, gay and lesbian meetings were formed. Since the 1980s, as the need arose, other new groups have formed, while some of the older ones have folded.

The first Santa Fe Central Office was opened in the radio building on Marcy Street, where the rent was about \$200 per month. The office was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1989.

As with Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, Santa Fe A.A. has continued to grow and prosper and maintain its primary purpose: "to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers."



Shown here is the visitors' registrar in use by the Santa Fe Group of A.A. from 1948 to 1952. Four A.A. members founded the group, which was the city's first, in the spring of 1946.