

# ALTERNATIVE

"INTER-GROUP NEWSLETTER FOR THE READING AREA"

March, 1996

*Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives  
over to the care of God as we understood Him*

## LET GO - LET GOD

*It is when we try to make our will conform with  
God's that we begin to use it rightly. To all of us this  
was a most wonderful revelation.*

*Our whole trouble had been the misuse of will power.  
We had tried to bombard our problems with it instead of  
attempting to bring it into agreement with God's intention  
for us. To make this increasingly possible is the purpose  
of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, and Step Three opens the door.*

*- Page 40, Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions*





# Chairman's Message...



## The Washingtonians

*Dethroning King Alcohol, The Washingtonians in Baltimore, 1840-1845* appeared in the *Maryland Historical Magazine* in 1992. Here is a review.

Six artisans, a carpenter, a tailor, a blacksmith, a wheelright, a coachmaker, and a silversmith, formed the Washington Temperance Society in a tavern in Baltimore in 1840. The society was named after our nation's first president, a man known to have sipped a few. The "original six" referred to themselves as "reformed drunkards." In the first year they had seven hundred members and within three years over half a million people joined them. Yet, by 1845 they had ceased organized operation and by 1850, the society had vanished.

### What happened?

In the early 1800's no one believed that alcoholics could be saved. One prevailing attitude was that if you can keep the temperate people temperate, then the drunkards will soon die and the problem will be over. So the temperance societies gave up on the drunkards and wanted to out-law alcohol. But the Washingtonians forgave the drunkard. They claimed drunkenness was not his guilt, but his fate.

The drunkard was to sign "the pledge" and then go out and recruit others. "Every man brings a man." They went to meetings and listened to "experience speeches" which told of the drunkard as a villain who casts out the demon alcohol and returns to his happy family - not just "his" family, but "her" family as well. The Washingtonians accepted women although women were thought to be immune from drunkenness by most people. They also welcomed ministers to attend, but not to preach.

Benjamin Rush, in 1784, suggested the "disease" model for the first time. In 1849, the term

alcoholism was coined. The Washingtonians accepted the disease model but continued to call themselves reformed drunkards, not alcoholics.

They advertised widely that they had the cure - the only cure - take the pledge. The pledge never fails. Their meetings took the form of debates, concerts, addresses, and even sing-alongs. Many people joined their cause even though they were not drunkards.

The Washingtonians were opposed to prohibition. Washingtonian president William Mitchell said, "You can pile up laws as high as heaven between the drinking man and the bottle and the man and the bottle will meet." So, the Washingtonians came into direct conflict with the prohibitionists. That became an issue between the elite and the common drunkard because the other temperance societies were made up of the elite. Soon they found themselves in direct conflict with various religious groups. Name calling, public arguments, and positioning became common.

Three things are obvious. First, the Washingtonians had two steps, similar to our Step 1 and Step 12, but they had no spiritual guide for living, that is, none of our middle steps. Second, they had no traditions that could guide them away from the pitfalls that befell them. Third, they had no singleness of purpose.

The plight of the Washingtonians did not go unnoticed by Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill Wilson studied their activities and wanted to be sure that A. A. did not make the same mistakes. In *A.A.'s Legacy of Service*, Bill argues for:

- no endorsements or alliances.
- no use of the A.A. name for the benefit of other causes.
- one singleness of purpose.
- attraction rather than promotion. (p. 10)

It was also interesting to note that *The A.A. Grapevine* published 12 articles on the Washingtonians between 1945 and 1976.

Chair, WAIA Bd. of Directors

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Zimmerman, Jonathan, "Dethroning King Alcohol, *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Winter, 1992, pp. 375-398.