

**WILLIAMSPORT
GROUP**



GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

District 48
THE WILLIAMSPORT GROUP
A History

The Williamsport Group was started in October of 1943, by an artist named Horace Hand who lived in Williamsport. Recently sober, he had been traveling to Harrisburg (a distance of 80 miles or so) once a week by train to attend a meeting there. Aside from being time consuming, this became expensive because of the need for transportation in Harrisburg.

After a time he was joined by several other men, whose names have been lost to posterity. They decided that there was no real need to incur the time and expense of traveling to Harrisburg. They started their own meeting in Horace's home where they had open discussions on all aspects of A. A. and their lives.

At that time and for most of the next two decades, there were only men members in the Williamsport Group. It was not considered ladylike to have alcohol problems. On the other hand, it was common practice even into the early '70s for non-alcoholic wives to accompany their husbands to A.A. meetings. In the '70s a local Al Anon chapter was formed and this practice slowly died out.

It is not recorded exactly when the first woman was accepted into the group. However, by the '70s this was no longer considered unusual. Women were a distinct minority, but they participated fully in meetings and group activities.

It soon became too crowded in Horace's home so they persuaded the pastor of the Grace Methodist Church at Campbell and Grace streets to let them meet there on Tuesday nights. This is more remarkable than it sounds nowadays, because A.A. was not a well known entity at the time. Horace related that the pastor had some qualms about letting a bunch of drunks (the pastor was politer than that) use his church every week. Accordingly, the group was particularly careful to be particularly circumspect in the use of the church and to leave it in a better state every week than they found it.

They called themselves The Williamsport Group because there was no other group in the city for many years. The size of the group waxed and waned as people moved in or out of town, but usually was between 10 and 40 people in during the period from 1943 until 1977. There had been a expansions after W.W.II and the Korean war, but these leveled out again.

In 1977, it appeared that the group was going to permanently remain at a membership level of 40 or more people. So other meetings in Williamsport and Muncy were formed. Still the size of the Williamsport Group remained in the 40's and continued that way for a few years.

THE WILLIAMSPORT GROUP (CONT'D)

In the early 1980's there was another period of growth. This was due to the practice of rehabilitation centers in Philadelphia and New Jersey recommending Williamsport as a good place to stay sober. There was a remarkable increase in members of A.A. in Williamsport during this period. Attendance at the Williamsport meeting ballooned. It was still the premier meeting in the area, but it was then that the concept of 90 meetings in 90 days was introduced to the area, which caused a proliferation of new meetings. All of the meetings in the Williamsport area are the children or grandchildren of the Williamsport meeting. Now (April, 96) we are seeing the great grandchildren.

Again the attendance at the Williamsport meeting waxed and waned during the 80's and 90's but the average attendance was much higher than it had been in previous decades. The meeting became a non-smoking meeting at the behest of the church, much to the delight of many and the disgust of some.

There has been a variety of formats used during the over half century of the meeting's existence. Open Discussion, Big Book, Step Meeting, and Speaker Meeting are some of them. Currently, a format that varies from week to week is used.

There has been remarkably little friction between the church and the Williamsport Meeting over half a century. The worst problems in the last twenty years concerned forgetting to turn out the lights or turn the thermostat down. These were easily cured. More serious problems have arisen, but turned out to be from other groups in other fellowships who were using the church. Currently, relations with the church are good.

To sum up, after more than half a century, the Williamsport Group is healthy and vigorous. It looks as though it should continue that way indefinitely.

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After a time he was joined by several other men, whose names have been lost to posterity. They decided that there was no real need to incur the time and expense of traveling to Harrisburg. They started their own meeting in Horace's home where they had open discussions on all aspects of A.A. and their lives.

The Tuesday night meeting that took place in Horace's home in South Williamsport became too large. The meeting then moved for the first time to Newberry and later to the Williamsport National Bank Building. In the 50's the group became large enough to secure several rooms in a building on East 3rd Street, but membership declined and the building was abandoned.

Glen H. tried to hold things together in the 50's when membership declined. The meeting moved to several churches in the area. One pastor was a friend of A.A., but the congregation threw the group out, saying they were stealing silverware. During the 50's the group had a room at Divine Providence Hospital - Detox drunks through Knickerbocker 5 day treatment program, developed by Dr. Silkworth. Members would take turns staying with the newcomer. Horace also served as Delegate for Eastern PA in 1957-58.

In 1959 or 1960 the group moved to Grace United Methodist Church and has been there ever since. Horace related that the pastor had some qualms about letting a bunch of drunks (the pastor was politer than that) use his church every week. Accordingly, the group was particularly careful to be particularly circumspect in the use of the church and to leave it in a better state every week than they found it.

They called themselves The Williamsport Group because there was no other group in the city for many years. The size of the group waxed and waned as people moved in or out of town, usually was between 10 and 40 people during the period from 1943 until 1977. There had been an expansion after W.W.II and the Korean War, but these leveled out again.

Over the next two decades, there were only men members in the Williamsport Group. It was not considered ladylike to have alcohol problems. On the other hand, it was common practice even into the early 70's for non-alcoholic wives to accompany their

husbands to A.A. meetings. In the 70's a local Al Anon chapter was formed and this practice slowly died out.

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Again the attendance at the Williamsport meeting waxed and waned during the 80's and 90's but the average attendance was much higher than it had been in previous decades. The meeting became a non-smoking meeting at the behest of the church, much to the delight of many and the disgust of some.

In 1994 an Alkathon was started yearly. The format has varied over the last half century of the meeting's existence. Open Discussion, Big Book, Step Meeting, and Speaker Meeting are some of them. Currently, a format that varies from week to week is used. The home group members now rotate monthly to chair the meeting. Members of this group are active in taking meetings into the jails, Districts, and Area. The members are also active in getting other groups and members to speak at the DC 4 State Annual Convention held in Winchester, VA.

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The Williamsport Group History from Area 59 Archives - (Unknown Author)

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At that time and for most of the next two decades, there were only men members in the Williamsport Group. It was not considered "ladylike" to have alcohol problems. On the other hand, it was common practice even into the early 70s for non-alcoholic wives to accompany their husbands to AA meetings. In the 70s, a local Al-Anon chapter was formed and this practice slowly died out.

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The Tuesday Night Williamsport Group History

Updated January, 2022

The Williamsport Group began in 1943 by a man named Horace H. Horace had lost his driving license for drunk driving. Someone had told him about an AA group in Harrisburg PA. Every week he took the train to Harrisburg to attend that meeting. This was in the early 1940's. There were no meetings in this area of PA. Eventually, five men joined him, and they all rode the train, making the trip to the Harrisburg meeting together. Gradually, others heard about this group through a classified ad in the local newspaper. If a person wanted to find out about this group, a letter could be written, to PO Box 11 and Horace or someone else would contact them.

The first AA meetings in Williamsport were held at Horace's house, a small house in South Williamsport. As the group grew larger, (to more than six) the house became too small. The meeting began to move from place to place. For a while, the group met in a building in Newberry, above a drug store. Then they secured rooms in the Williamsport National Bank Building. In the early 1950's the group became very large. Several members agreed to underwrite the rent for the first floor of a building on East Third Street. (This later became the Red Cross Building) It had three rooms and a bath. One member was hired as a caretaker to keep it open 24 hours. It was during this time the AA group also had a room at Divine Providence Hospital. There, a detox treatment known as the "Knickerbocker 5-Day Program" was available.

This treatment was developed and perfected at Knickerbocker Hospital in New York the guidance of Dr. William Silkworth. Dr. Silkworth is known for his work with alcoholics and Bill W. In the early days of AA when a new member needed to be detoxed, he could be admitted to Divine Providence Hospital and AA members would take turns staying with him. For reasons unknown, the membership of the group declined in the late 1950's and the building on East Third Street was abandoned. Through this membership declined, one faithful AA member, Glen H. tried to hold things together. The group moved from church to church.

One location was St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Montoursville. The Pastor was a friend of AA, but the congregation was not. They put the group out, claiming they were stealing the silverware. The group moved to Grace United Methodist Church in 1959 or 1960. Since its beginning, the group has always met on a Tuesday night. Horace himself was responsible for helping to start meetings all over Northern PA – Sunbury, Lock Haven, State College and even as far as Scranton. He spoke before many civic groups like, Kiwanis, Rotary, Exchange and was awarded the Benjamin Rush

Award, which he gave to the group. (Benjamin Rush was a doctor in Philadelphia, the first to mention alcoholism as an illness, in 1774. He was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence for PA in 1776.)

Horace also served as a Delegate to the General Service Conference in 1957-1958.

In the early 1970's new groups began to form in Williamsport. The Divine Providence Hospital's Sunday Night Meeting was one of the first. A member named Bob began that meeting with the help of Sister Claire at the hospital. Sister Claire was also helpful in starting Al-Anon in Williamsport.

There was also a Friday Night Meeting in Montoursville at the Lutheran Church. The Pastor at that church was a friend of AA.

It is interesting to note that in the 1940's there were no women in AA in Williamsport; only two or three members in the 1950 – 1960's. Betty B. and Lela W. (deceased) were the first women members in the 1970's.

Following in the group founder, Horace's footsteps, current member of the Williamsport Group, Lowell Long has also served as Delegate to the General Service Convention in 2009 – 2010.

In 2009, due to the closing of Grace United Methodist Church, the Williamsport group moved to the location of the First United Methodist Church in Williamsport. (The Fountain Church) Then, In October of 2018, The Williamsport Group moved again, to the New Covenant United Church of Christ in Williamsport.

Then the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 happened; the Williamsport Group did not meet for a few months; however, in the summer of 2020 the group members decided to meet at one of the pavilions in Memorial Park Williamsport. They continued to have meetings in the park until fall of 2020. Due to the Pandemic, it was difficult to find a new meeting location. The weather started to get colder and the days were darker earlier. The group finally found their current location, at Liberty Church at 102 E. third St.

Just to mention; October 2022, will be this home group's 25th year of annual alkathons, and 79 years of the Williamsport Group Anniversary. When the group first started the alkathons at Grace UM Church, the meetings went on for 24 hours, around the clock. Members would bring sleeping bags to the church, as not to miss a thing.

The Williamsport Group hopes to see you when they celebrate their 25 year in annual alkathons.

-Bill Malloy – January, 2022

The Tuesday Night Williamsport Group History, Originally written by unknown author Appended by Bill Malloy and now Chuck Williams

The Williamsport Group began in 1943 by a man named Horace Hand. Horace had lost his driving license for drunk driving somewhat auspicious in 1943. He was told an AA group in Harrisburg PA. (80 Miles) Every week he boarded the train to Harrisburg to attend that meeting. This was in the early 1940's. There were no meetings in this area of PA. Eventually, five men joined him, and they all rode the train, making the trip to the Harrisburg meeting together. Gradually, others heard about this group through a classified ad in the Williamsport Sun Gazette. If a person wanted to find out about this group, a letter could be written, to PO Box 11 and Horace or someone else would contact them.

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Horace also served as a Delegate to the General Service Conference in 1957-1958. Then the early 1970's new groups began to form in Williamsport. The Divine Providence Hospital's Sunday Night Meeting was one of the first. A member named Bob began that meeting with the help of Sister Claire at the hospital. Sister Claire was also helpful

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Following in the Wmspt group founder, Horace's footsteps, current member of the Williamsport Group, Lowell L. has also served as Area 59, Delegate to the General Service Convention in 2009 – 2010. Along with Delegates this group has had 4 DCM'S and several ADCM'S

The group first started the Anniversary Alkathon meetings at Grace UM Church, and the meetings went on for 24 hours, around the clock. Members would bring sleeping bags to the church, as not to miss a thing.

In 2009, when the Grace Church changed their direction and became a community shelter; the Williamsport Group moved to First UM Church on Market Street (Fountain Church). However, in January 2018 the Wmspt Group decided to find a new home at New Covenant Church of Christ 202 East Third Street, Tuesday night at 7 pm.

Then the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 happened; the Williamsport Group did not meet for a few months; however, in the summer & autumn of 2020 the group members decided to meet at one of the pavilions in Memorial Park in Williamsport. They continued to have meetings in the park until fall; and afterwards due to the Pandemic, it was difficult to find a new meeting location.

The weather started to get colder, and the days were darker earlier. The group found a new location at Liberty Church 102 East Third Street in Williamsport PA where we currently meet. Currently we have a very active Home group and elder statesman to new comers all actively involved in AA.

Just to mention; October 2023, will be this home group's 27th year of annual alkathons, and 80 years of the Williamsport Group Anniversary. The Williamsport Group hopes to see you when they celebrate their 27 years in annual alkathons and the group's 81st anniversary.

The Wmspt Group is still Growing Strong because - We are a Service Home Group!