

# How Alcoholics Anonymous Arrived and Flourished in Dallas, Texas

## A Comprehensive Historical Research Report for Workshop Presentation

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The message of recovery reached Dallas not through triumph but through desperation—first through letters from isolated alcoholics seeking hope, then through failed promotional efforts, and finally through a woman who simply opened her home. This PhD-level research report traces the complete lineage of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex from the fellowship's 1935 founding in Akron, Ohio, through its arrival in Texas via Houston in 1940, to the establishment of Dallas's enduring AA community in 1943. The history illuminates critical principles about attraction versus promotion, the power of the home group model, and how one alcoholic helping another created a network that now serves thousands.

What distinguishes Dallas AA history is its dual narrative: the cautionary tale of Kent W.'s promotional "false start" in 1941-1942 and the sustainable, attraction-based foundation laid by Esther E. beginning in April 1943. This contrast provides a living case study in AA's Twelve Traditions before they were formally adopted. The story of Dallas AA is ultimately about how a handful of desperate people—**fewer than twenty sober members by 1945**—created the infrastructure that now supports over 160 groups across North Texas.

(AA History Presentation & Script) (Silkworth)

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### The pre-Dallas context: AA's Texas entry through Houston (1940)

Before Dallas could have AA, Texas itself needed the message. That transmission came through a remarkable figure: **Larry J. (Larry Jewell)**, a Cleveland newspaper man who brought AA to Houston in early 1940 carrying nothing but a Big Book and a spiritual experience from reading it on the train.

#### Larry J.: The man who carried AA to Texas with only a book

Larry J.'s story embodies the desperate circumstances of early recovery. Found in freezing Cleveland weather with no coat, one lung collapsed from tuberculosis and the other with a tube protruding from his chest, he had "drunk himself into the gutter." Louis Seltzer, editor of the Cleveland Press, sent a search party to find him and paid for his hospitalization. During his sanatorium recovery from DTs, malnutrition, and exposure, doctors advised him to move to a warmer climate for his pulmonary condition. (Silkworth)

**What makes Larry J.'s story historically significant is this: he had never attended a single AA meeting before coming to Houston.** His sponsors—Dr. Bob Smith (AA's co-founder) and Clarence Snyder—gave him a Big Book the night before he left for Texas. (Silkworth) On the train to Houston, reading the book, Larry experienced a spiritual awakening that he described as feeling "all in one piece again." He arrived in January 1940 determined to help other alcoholics.

Upon arriving, Larry approached Houston's prominent physicians to find alcoholics and persuaded Allan C. Bartlett, editor of the Houston Press, to run a series of articles on AA. Beginning **February 8, 1940**, the Houston Press ran Lppbsgaa six anonymous articles that became **the first AA pamphlet ever published**—the only AA literature besides the Big Book until late 1940. Recoverycollectibles The articles bore titles like "Story of a 'Way Out' for Hopeless Drinkers: How an Idea Originated by Ex-Alcoholics Has Helped 2000 to Recover."

**On April 1, 1940**, Larry wrote "The Texas Prayer," used to open AA meetings throughout Texas—giving Texas a distinct recovery identity from the earliest days. The first Houston meeting was held **March 15, 1940** at the YWCA Building. By September 1940, Houston was listed among nine "secure" AA groups in the United States, alongside Akron, New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.

Larry J. struggled with his leadership style, running the Houston group with "something of an iron hand." When the group voted for a steering committee based on Eastern AA practices, Larry pulled out resentfully and relapsed. He returned to the group in 1943 but died later that year from his longstanding health conditions. His legacy, however, endured: the people he helped included **Esther E.**, who would carry the message to Dallas.

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## **The false start in Dallas: Kent W. and the promotional approach (1941-1942)**

The history of AA in Dallas does not begin with success. It begins with failure—and that failure teaches lessons still relevant today.

### **Ruth T.'s cry for help (June 14, 1941)**

The earliest recorded impulse for recovery in Dallas came from **Ruth T.**, who on **June 14, 1941** sent a letter to Ruth Hock, Bill Wilson's secretary in New York, inquiring about AA in her area. This correspondence represents the pre-organizational phase—a lone woman desperately seeking connection. AA History Presentation & Script Ruth T.'s letter demonstrated that **demand for recovery existed in Dallas before any supply of meetings was available**. The General Service Office in New York functioned as a switchboard, connecting isolated alcoholics with the nearest help, which at that time was hundreds of miles away in Houston.

### **Kent W.: "Chief Sponsor" and the lessons of promotion**

On **December 1, 1941**, Kent W. arrived in Dallas. He had achieved sobriety in Florida and came with a public relations background and an aggressive strategy to establish a group. Kent self-styled himself as the **"Chief Sponsor"** of Dallas AA—a title that directly contradicts the spirit of rotating leadership and humility later codified in Tradition Two ("Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern").

AA History Presentation & Script

Kent organized the first recorded Dallas meeting on **January 7, 1942** at the White Plaza Hotel. Despite severe weather, twelve people attended, and a story in the *Dallas Morning News* generated **72 inquiries**.

AA History Presentation & Script The publicity looked promising.

**Yet this early effort collapsed entirely.** Kent W. was "never heard from again" shortly after these initial activities. (AA History Presentation & Script) The analysis of this failure reveals critical organizational lessons:

| Feature          | Kent W.'s 1942 Approach         | Why It Failed                          |
|------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Leadership Style | "Chief Sponsor" (hierarchical)  | Group dependent on single personality  |
| Venue            | Hotel (public, commercial)      | Lacked intimacy for vulnerable sharing |
| Method           | Newspaper publicity (promotion) | Attracted curiosity, not desperation   |
| Founder's Roots  | Transient (from Florida)        | No established community connections   |

The White Plaza Hotel group demonstrates that publicity alone cannot sustain a spiritual fellowship. This failure cleared the ground for a more sustainable approach the following year.

## **The true foundation: Esther E. and the birth of sustainable Dallas AA (1943)**

If Kent W. represented the promotional false start, **Esther E.** represented the spiritual bedrock upon which Dallas AA was built. Her story, "A Flower of the South," appears in the Second and Third Editions of the Big Book, and she is pictured with AA co-founder Bill Wilson. (Aadallas)

### **Esther E.'s journey to sobriety**

Esther was raised in New Orleans where social drinking was entirely acceptable—her family had wine with dinner and cordials afterward. She first recognized what alcohol could do at her own wedding when, seeing her nervousness, her father ordered a servant to bring her something to drink. The servant brought a water glass full of bourbon. (Silkworth)

By the time she reached Dallas in the 1920s, her drinking had progressed severely. She lived in Dallas from 1927-1932, trying "all the doctors, hospitals and cures (the Sanitarium three times)." (Silkworth) Eventually, she and her husband moved to Houston, where her drinking continued to escalate. Her bottom came after being arrested while walking the dog—a patrol car saw her staggering.

### **The Saturday Evening Post connection**

**This is where history turns on a pivotal moment.** A few weeks before Esther hit bottom, her husband had read the Jack Alexander article in the **Saturday Evening Post** (published March 1, 1941)—the article that transformed AA from a small fellowship of 2,000 members into a national movement of 8,000 within one year.

Her husband showed her the article with an ultimatum: "If you will try this thing, I'll go along with you. If you don't, you will have to go home. I cannot sit by and watch you destroy yourself!" Esther wrote to the General

Service Office in New York and within a week received AA literature along with a hand-written letter from **Ruth Hock**. That personal touch, Esther later said, "did a lot to help" her. (Recovery Speakers)

**Esther E.'s sobriety date: May 16, 1941** (in Houston, Texas). (Silkworth)

### The founding of Dallas AA (April 2, 1943)

During her second year in AA, Esther and her husband transferred to Dallas. (Silkworth) (Recovery Speakers) When she arrived in 1943, she found a vacuum—Kent W.'s previous efforts had evaporated. The telephone number Ruth Hock had given her for a Dallas contact was disconnected. (Recovery Speakers)

Undaunted, Esther began the work of creating "The Dallas Group" in her own home. On **March 29, 1943**, she wrote to New York: "This is where I had been so sick for five years. Where I started trying out all the doctors, hospitals and cures (the Sanitarium three times) so I've lots to do. First off, four doctors to call on and let them look over 'exhibit A' (me)! My minister (Episcopal) has two prospects for us." (Silkworth)

**On April 2, 1943**, the first meeting of "The Dallas Group" was convened in Esther's home. Notably, **Ruth T.**—the woman who had written the initial inquiry letter in 1941—was present. This moment represents the closing of the loop: the seeker and the carrier of the message finally united to form a sustainable nucleus of recovery.

(AA History Presentation & Script)

**This date—April 2, 1943—marks the lineage point for every AA group in the Dallas metroplex today, including suburban groups throughout North Texas.**

### The character of early Dallas AA

The group met Tuesdays and Fridays at 8:00 PM in Esther's home. This domestic setting—in contrast to Kent W.'s hotel ballroom—fostered intimacy and accountability essential for early recovery.

(AA History Presentation & Script) News spread strictly by word-of-mouth. Esther worked for two years with alcoholics at **Terrell State Hospital**, the only facility in the area that would accept alcoholics. (Silkworth)

By **1945**, the group had grown sufficiently to rent space at **912½ Main Street** in downtown Dallas. The meetings were only at 8:00 PM and were strictly speaker meetings. (Aadallas) Growth remained slow but solid: **fewer than twenty people were sober in Dallas AA by the end of 1945.** (Aadallas)

This slow growth indicates adherence to sponsorship and thorough step work rather than mass recruitment. Esther's leadership style—characterized by gratitude and service—set the tone for the entire region. Her copy of the Big Book, **inscribed by Bill Wilson**, remains at the Dallas Central Office, (Aadallas) a physical link between the founders and the local fellowship. (AA History Presentation & Script) (Aadallas)

**Esther E. died June 3, 1960**, with slightly more than nineteen years of continuous sobriety. (Silkworth) (Aadallas)

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## **Post-war expansion and the suburban shift (1946-1960)**

The conclusion of World War II marked a turning point for both America and for AA. The return of military personnel, many struggling with trauma and alcoholism, created a membership surge (Aadallas) that required structural evolution. (Aadallas)

### **Searcy W. and the founding of the Suburban Group (1946)**

**Searcy W. (Whaley)** became one of the most important figures in Dallas AA history. His story illustrates both the desperation of early recovery and the organizational development that followed.

Searcy first heard about AA in 1945 from an old drinking buddy. After losing his job in November 1945, he stayed drunk until April 1946. Coming to Dallas to find AA, he was placed in a "drying out place" off Maple Street—the only facility in Dallas that would accept alcoholics. On his third day there, he was taken to a meeting at 912½ Main Street.

**Searcy W.'s sobriety date: May 5, 1946.** He would maintain continuous sobriety for **57 years**, becoming Dallas's oldest known AA member until his death in September 2003. (Aadallas)

In **September 1946**, Searcy and others formed the **Suburban Group** at the corner of Dickason and Sale Streets, near Lee Park, just north of downtown. (Aadallas) This was a pivotal moment in Dallas AA history:

- **It marked the first decentralization** of AA from downtown to neighborhoods
- **It created the prototype** for the "neighborhood group"—smaller, community-focused entities providing easier access
- **It demonstrated that AA needed to exist where people lived**, not just where they congregated centrally

The Suburban Group became the mother of many Dallas groups. Out of it grew:

- Preston Group
- Belmont Group
- Belwood Group
- Central Group
- Town North Group
- Many others through subsequent decades (Aadallas)

**The Oak Cliff Group** formed at approximately the same time as the Suburban Group, establishing AA's presence south of downtown.

### **The Dallas Central Office opens (September 18, 1947)**

By 1947, despite having only **two active groups** (The Dallas Group and the Suburban Group), local leadership

recognized the need for service infrastructure. The **Dallas Central Office** opened on **September 18, 1947** in the Davis Building on Akard Street—"a musty old office, a little cluttered, but filled with AA caring." (Silkworth)

The first Office Manager was **Dick P.**, who suffered from "Jamaica Ginger Paralysis" (Jake Leg)—a permanent disability caused by toxic prohibition-era alcohol substitutes. Despite his physical limitations, he managed the phones, coordinated Twelfth Step calls, and sold literature. (AA History Presentation & Script) (Silkworth) His condition serves as a reminder of the physical toll of alcoholism and the redeeming power of service.

**Establishing a Central Office with only two groups was an act of profound faith.** It laid the infrastructure for the explosion of growth that followed:

- By **1968**: 8-9 groups (Silkworth)
- By **1973**: 30 groups (AA History Presentation & Script)
- **Today**: Over 160 groups serving thousands of members

The Central Office became the nervous system of the fellowship, connecting the limbs (groups) to the brain (resources and information).

### Searcy W. and the Twelve Traditions

In **1948**, 25 AA members from across Texas met in Lubbock. Searcy arranged for Bill Wilson to attend from Phoenix. On the airplane, Bill showed Searcy his handwritten notes—the original Twelve Traditions. Searcy's initial response was dismissive: "We don't need this down here. We love each other." (Aadallas)

At the **1950 International Convention in Cleveland** (attended by 8,000-9,000 people), the Twelve Traditions were adopted (Wikipedia) with no dissenting votes. Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson had personally schooled Searcy on the Traditions beforehand. Searcy came to understand that the Traditions weren't restrictions but protections—guidelines that would allow AA to survive beyond any individual personality.

### Ebby Thacher's Dallas recovery (1953-1958)

One of the most remarkable chapters in Dallas AA history involves **Ebby Thacher**—the man who first carried the message to Bill Wilson in November 1934. (Wikipedia) Ebby had struggled with sobriety for 18 years after helping Bill get sober.

In early 1953, Bill Wilson visited Dallas and met with Searcy W. When Searcy asked what Bill would most like to see happen in AA, Bill replied: "I'd rather see Ebby have a chance to get sober." Mutual friends found Ebby on the Bowery in New York City, dried him out briefly, and sent him to Dallas with a pint of whiskey.

Ebby arrived at Searcy's clinic in poor physical, mental, and spiritual condition—"cussing out Bill and Dr. Bob and me and everybody else." Eventually, he asked to attend a meeting. **He got sober at the Suburban Club** and remained sober in Dallas for 4-5 years (with a brief slip in 1954). After meeting Chloe K. in 1954, he maintained seven years of sobriety.

Ebby left Dallas around 1958-1961 and died **March 21, 1966** with 2½ years of sobriety. His story demonstrates that the same fellowship that had grown from his original message to Bill Wilson could later save him—and that recovery is possible even after decades of struggle.

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## Fort Worth's parallel history

While Dallas was organizing, Fort Worth developed its own recovery infrastructure, creating a dual-hub system across North Texas.

### Early Fort Worth (1941)

Fort Worth's history begins with letters on file at the General Service Office in New York. On **June 4, 1941**, AA's New York office answered **George McL.**'s handwritten letter, telling him the only Texas AA group was in Houston. On **July 23, 1941** (probable), Fort Worth held its first group meeting. George wrote to New York on July 24: "I am happy to report that I have the A.A. well on its way in Fort Worth. At our meeting last night we had seven members."

However, continuous AA activity in Fort Worth is dated to **August 28, 1943**, when **Ralph** (a railroad switchman and former deputy sheriff) sought George's help after a painful drunk. Ralph became "an apostle for the Fellowship, one of the most zealous Twelfth-Steppers of all time." He and George continued meeting weekly at George's home, reading the Big Book, talking, meditating, and praying. (Silkworth)

The **Fort Worth Central Office** was established in **late summer 1977** after two previous attempts had failed. (Silkworth) Notable Fort Worth groups include **The Glass House** (founded 1983, emphasizing spirituality) and **The Harbor Group**. (AA History Presentation & Script)

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## The organizational structure: From groups to Area 65

As the number of groups exploded through the 1970s and 1980s, informal cooperation required formalization.

### The Dallas Intergroup Association

The Dallas Central Office evolved into the Dallas Intergroup Association:

- **1968:** Reorganization—Central Office became Intergroup Office (a local member loaned \$2,000 to buy literature) (Silkworth)
- **1989:** Incorporated as **Dallas Intergroup Association**, a 501(c)(3) non-profit (Silkworth)
- **April 2000:** Renamed again as **Dallas AA Central Office** (Silkworth)

The Intergroup handles local services: printing meeting schedules, maintaining the website (aadallas.org), and operating the 24/7 hotline (214-887-6699). It serves as the "front door" for newcomers, funded by voluntary

group contributions per the Seventh Tradition.

## Northeast Texas Area 65 (NETA 65)

While Intergroup handles local services, **NETA 65** connects the region to the General Service Conference in New York. The Area covers northeast Texas from Texarkana to Abilene to Waco to the Texas/Louisiana border, containing 29 districts and over 512 groups.

The distinction is crucial: **Intergroup is about carrying the message (Twelfth Step), while General Service is about protecting the message (Traditions and Concepts).** Groups participate through their General Service Representatives (GSRs), ensuring their voice is heard at the national level.

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## The home group concept and its connection to Dallas history

Understanding "home groups" requires understanding how early AA functioned—and Dallas provides a perfect case study.

### How the home group concept emerged

The home group concept emerged organically from AA's earliest structure. AA began in 1935 with gatherings at Dr. Bob's home in Akron. ([Wikipedia](#)) This residential, intimate model laid the groundwork for what evolved into the "home group" concept. Key developments include:

- **1935:** First gatherings at Dr. Bob's home
- **1939:** Big Book published, codifying principles
- **1946:** Twelve Traditions published in AA Grapevine ([Wikipedia](#))
- **1950:** Traditions formally adopted

According to the conference-approved pamphlet "The A.A. Group...Where It All Begins" (P-16): "Traditionally, most A.A. members through the years have found it important to belong to one group that they call their 'home group.' This is the group where they accept service responsibilities and try to sustain friendships." (aa)

### Dallas AA as home group model

Early Dallas AA perfectly exemplifies the home group evolution:

1. **Esther's living room (1943):** The original "home" in home group—intimate, domestic, relational
2. **912½ Main Street (1945):** Transition to formal space while maintaining intimacy
3. **Suburban Group (1946):** First neighborhood-based "home" group—decentralizing AA to where people lived
4. **Central Office (1947):** Infrastructure supporting multiple home groups

5. **Suburban expansion (1946-present):** The Rowlett Group and others as descendants of the original model

The contrast between Kent W.'s hotel ballroom approach and Esther E.'s living room approach illustrates why home groups work: they create the relational intimacy necessary for vulnerable sharing and genuine connection.

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## **The role of the Big Book and the Saturday Evening Post article**

Two pieces of literature transformed AA from a regional curiosity to a national movement—and both directly shaped Texas AA history.

### **The Big Book (published April 10, 1939)**

The Big Book served as "sponsor by mail" for isolated alcoholics who had no access to meetings. **Larry J. came to Texas having never attended an AA meeting**, sobered solely by reading the Big Book on the train. The first group formed solely by mail was in **Little Rock, Arkansas (May 1940)**—demonstrating the book's power to transmit recovery without human contact.

The introduction to the first AA pamphlet (derived from Larry J.'s Houston Press articles) noted: "He found the Cleveland A.A. Fellowship. Now he's on a Texas newspaper!" The book enabled recovery to spread faster than any individual could travel.

### **The Jack Alexander Saturday Evening Post Article (March 1, 1941)**

The article "Alcoholics Anonymous: Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others" appeared in one of America's most widely-read magazines. Jack Alexander, known for his skepticism and hard-nosed reporting, became "an enthusiastic believer" after exhaustive investigation.

#### **Impact on national AA:**

- Before article (end of 1940): approximately 2,000 members
- By end of 1941: 8,000 members—**a quadrupling in one year**
- March 12, 1941: Ruth Hock reported 918 inquiries in 12 days
- April 7, 1941: 1,500-1,600 letters requesting help

#### **Direct Texas impact:**

- **Esther E.'s husband read this article**, showed it to her with an ultimatum, and she contacted GSO—leading directly to Dallas AA's founding
- **Bishop Everett Jones** read the article, which mentioned Houston, initiating San Antonio AA efforts
- The article validated AA's credibility for skeptical prospects throughout Texas

Bill Wilson later wrote: "It is not the least exaggeration to say that Jack's article of nine years ago brought recovery within the reach of 10,000 alcoholics and great happiness to as many homes."

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## Complete chronological timeline of AA in Dallas

| Year | Date          | Event                                                | Key Figures        | Significance                             |
|------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1935 | June 10       | AA founded in Akron, Ohio                            | Bill W., Dr. Bob   | Global origin of the fellowship          |
| 1939 | April 10      | Big Book published                                   | Bill W.            | The vehicle that would carry AA to Texas |
| 1940 | January       | Larry J. arrives in Houston with Big Book            | Larry J.           | First AA presence in Texas               |
| 1940 | March 15      | First Houston AA meeting                             | Larry J.           | Texas entry point                        |
| 1940 | April 1       | "The Texas Prayer" written                           | Larry J.           | Distinct Texas AA identity               |
| 1940 | April         | First AA pamphlet published (Houston Press articles) | Larry J.           | Only literature besides Big Book         |
| 1940 | September     | Houston listed among 9 "secure" U.S. groups          | --                 | Texas AA validated                       |
| 1941 | March 1       | Saturday Evening Post article published              | Jack Alexander     | Quadrupled AA membership                 |
| 1941 | May 16        | Esther E.'s sobriety date (Houston)                  | Esther E.          | Future Dallas founder gets sober         |
| 1941 | June 14       | First Dallas inquiry letter to New York              | Ruth T.            | Earliest Dallas demand for AA            |
| 1941 | December 1    | Kent W. arrives in Dallas                            | Kent W.            | Beginning of "false start"               |
| 1942 | January 7     | First Dallas meeting (White Plaza Hotel)             | Kent W.            | Promotional approach                     |
| 1942 | Shortly after | Kent W.'s group collapses                            | Kent W.            | Promotional failure                      |
| 1943 | March 29      | Esther E. writes to New York from Dallas             | Esther E.          | Beginning of sustainable effort          |
| 1943 | April 2       | <b>First sustainable Dallas meeting</b>              | Esther E., Ruth T. | <b>True founding of Dallas AA</b>        |

| Year | Date          | Event                                             | Key Figures        | Significance                         |
|------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1943 | August 28     | Continuous AA activity begins in Fort Worth       | George McL., Ralph | Parallel development                 |
| 1943 | Later in year | Larry J. dies in Houston                          | Larry J.           | First Texas pioneer passes           |
| 1945 | --            | First organized Dallas group at 912½ Main Street  | --                 | Transition from home to formal space |
| 1945 | --            | Fewer than 20 people sober in Dallas AA           | --                 | Slow but solid growth                |
| 1946 | May 5         | Searcy W.'s sobriety date                         | Searcy W.          | Future Dallas elder gets sober       |
| 1946 | September     | Suburban Group founded                            | Searcy W.          | First neighborhood-based group       |
| 1946 | September     | Oak Cliff Group founded                           | --                 | South Dallas presence                |
| 1947 | September 18  | Dallas Central Office opens                       | Dick P.            | Infrastructure with only 2 groups    |
| 1948 | --            | Bill W. shows Searcy handwritten Traditions       | Bill W., Searcy W. | Texas connection to AA governance    |
| 1950 | --            | Twelve Traditions adopted at Cleveland Convention | --                 | Governance formalized                |
| 1953 | --            | Ebby Thacher comes to Dallas to get sober         | Ebby T., Searcy W. | Bill's sponsor saved in Dallas       |
| 1960 | June 3        | Esther E. dies (19+ years sober)                  | Esther E.          | Founder's legacy complete            |
| 1965 | October       | Preston Group founded                             | --                 | Suburban expansion continues         |
| 1968 | --            | Central Office reorganized as Intergroup          | --                 | 8-9 groups operating                 |
| 1977 | Late summer   | Fort Worth Central Office established             | --                 | Western metroplex infrastructure     |
| 1978 | --            | Lambda Dallas Group founded                       | --                 | LGBTQ+ community served              |
| 1983 | June 10       | The Glass House founded (Fort Worth)              | Don A., Bryan H.   | Spiritual emphasis group             |
| 1986 | --            | Dallas Gathering of Eagles convention founded     | --                 | Regional annual event                |

| Year | Date      | Event                                       | Key Figures | Significance             |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1989 | --        | Dallas Intergroup Association incorporated  | --          | Formal non-profit status |
| 1990 | September | Cornerstone Group founded                   | --          | Non-smoking pioneer      |
| 2000 | April     | Intergroup renamed Dallas AA Central Office | --          | Current name             |
| 2003 | September | Searcy W. dies (57+ years sober)            | Searcy W.   | Dallas elder passes      |

## Key figures of Dallas AA history: A prosopography

### Esther E. (1941-1960)

- **Role:** Founder of Dallas AA
- **Sobriety date:** May 16, 1941 (Houston) (Silkworth)
- **Big Book story:** "A Flower of the South" (pp. 384-392, 3rd Edition) (Silkworth)
- **Key contribution:** Opened her home to create first sustainable Dallas group
- **Death:** June 3, 1960 (19+ years sober) (Silkworth) (Silkworth)
- **Legacy:** Her inscribed Big Book displayed at Dallas Central Office

### Searcy W. (Whaley) (1946-2003)

- **Role:** Dallas's oldest known AA member; Suburban Group founder
- **Sobriety date:** May 5, 1946
- **Key contributions:**
  - Founded Suburban Group (September 1946)
  - Helped Ebby Thacher get sober (Silkworth)
  - Attended Yale Summer School of Alcohol Studies (1947)
  - Worked with Dr. E.M. Jellinek
  - Established treatment clinics in Lubbock, Dallas, Houston, and Carlsbad
- **Death:** September 2003 (57+ years sober) (Aadallas)

## Dick P.

- **Role:** First Dallas Central Office Director
- **Condition:** "Jamaica Ginger Paralysis" (Jake Leg) from toxic Prohibition-era alcohol (Silkworth)
- **Key contribution:** Managed phones, coordinated Twelfth Step calls despite disability
- **Significance:** Embodiment of the Responsibility Statement

## Larry J. (Larry Jewell)

- **Role:** Brought AA to Texas
- **Sobriety:** December 1939 (Cleveland)
- **Sponsors:** Dr. Bob Smith, Clarence Snyder (Silkworth)
- **Key contributions:**
  - Founded Houston AA (March 1940)
  - Wrote first AA pamphlet (Houston Press articles) (Recoverycollectibles)
  - Wrote "The Texas Prayer"
- **Death:** 1943

## Kent W.

- **Role:** "Chief Sponsor" of failed 1941-42 Dallas effort
- **Method:** Promotional approach through newspaper publicity
- **Outcome:** Group collapsed; Kent "never heard from again"
- **Significance:** Cautionary example of promotion vs. attraction

## Ruth T.

- **Role:** First Dallas inquiry
- **Action:** Wrote letter to New York (June 14, 1941)
- **Significance:** Present at first sustainable meeting (April 2, 1943)

## Ebby Thacher

- **Role:** Bill Wilson's original sponsor; (Wikipedia) recovered in Dallas
- **Dallas period:** 1953-1958
- **Key fact:** Got sober at the Suburban Club
- **Death:** March 21, 1966 (2½ years sober at death)

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## **Workshop discussion questions connecting history to recovery**

These questions are designed for mixed audiences (old-timers and newcomers) and connect Dallas AA history to personal recovery:

### **Understanding Our Heritage**

1. "Esther E. started Dallas AA in her home in 1943 when there were no other options. How does knowing this history affect how you view your own home group today?"
2. "In 1946, there were only about fourteen AA members in all of Dallas. Today there are thousands. What do you think allowed those early members to stay sober without the support systems we have today?"
3. "The lineage of every Dallas AA group traces back to April 2, 1943. How does understanding your group's genealogy—its connection to Esther E., to Houston, to Akron—change how you experience meetings?"

### **Attraction vs. Promotion**

4. "Kent W. promoted Dallas AA through newspaper articles and called himself 'Chief Sponsor.' Esther E. simply opened her home. Why do you think one approach failed and the other succeeded?"
5. "'Tradition Eleven says we should 'always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.' How does the story of Kent W.'s failure illustrate why this tradition matters?"
6. "How does your home group practice 'attraction rather than promotion' in the modern digital age? How do we balance letting people know we exist without violating the spirit of anonymity?"

### **Service and Sacrifice**

7. "Dick P. managed the Central Office phones despite suffering from Jamaica Ginger Paralysis—a disability from toxic Prohibition-era alcohol. What does his story teach us about service in spite of limitations?"
8. "The AA pamphlet says the home group is where we 'accept service responsibilities.' What was your first service commitment, and how did it affect your sobriety?"
9. "Searcy W. had 57 years of sobriety when he died. He once said to Bill Wilson that Texas AA didn't need the Traditions because 'We love each other down here.' Why do you think the Traditions were needed despite that love?"

## **Personal Recovery Application**

10. "Ebby Thacher, who first carried the message to Bill Wilson, struggled for 18 years before getting sober in Dallas at the Suburban Club. What does his story teach us about never giving up on anyone?"
11. "Esther E. worked for two years with one alcoholic at Terrell State Hospital who couldn't stay sober. What does her persistence teach us about carrying the message today?"
12. "Ruth T. wrote a letter seeking help in 1941 and was at the first sustainable Dallas meeting in 1943—a two-year wait. How does this compare to the immediate availability of meetings today? What's been gained or lost?"

## **Looking Forward**

13. "Early Dallas meetings were strictly speaker meetings at 8 PM only. Now we have dozens of meeting types and times. What has been gained? What might have been lost?"
  14. "What would you want newcomers 80 years from now to know about what AA means to you today?"
  15. "Based on what we've discussed about Dallas AA history and the home group concept, what is one thing you want to do differently in your recovery this week?"
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## **Interactive workshop activities for a 3-hour presentation**

### **Activity 1: "Building Dallas AA" Timeline Exercise (30-40 minutes)**

**Materials:** Large wall timeline, index cards with dates/events, markers

**Procedure:**

1. **Phase 1 (10 min):** Facilitator presents basic timeline backbone (1935 Akron → 1940 Houston → 1943 Dallas → 1946 Suburban Group → 1947 Central Office)
2. **Phase 2 (15 min):** Small groups receive cards with additional events; must place on timeline and explain significance
3. **Phase 3 (15 min):** Participants add their own sobriety dates, connecting personal history to collective history

**Discussion prompt:** "Where do you see yourself in this timeline? How does your story connect to the larger story of AA in Dallas?"

### **Activity 2: "Then and Now" Small Group Comparisons (25-30 minutes)**

**Setup:** Divide into groups of 4-6; each receives comparison card

## **Comparison Topics:**

- **Group A:** Meeting Locations (Esther's living room → churches and Zoom)
- **Group B:** Meeting Formats (speaker only → discussion, step study, Big Book)
- **Group C:** Size and Intimacy (14 members in all Dallas → thousands)
- **Group D:** Carrying the Message (word of mouth → websites and apps)

**Report back:** Each group shares key insights (2-3 minutes each)

## **Activity 3: "My Home Group Inventory" Reflection (15-20 minutes)**

### **Individual reflection questions:**

1. What initially drew me to my home group?
2. How does my home group help me carry the message?
3. Am I doing my fair share of service?
4. Do I participate in group conscience decisions?
5. One thing I'm grateful for about my home group
6. One thing I could do to strengthen my home group

**Pair share:** After individual reflection, participants pair up and share one insight

## **Activity 4: "Voices from Dallas AA History" Dramatic Reading (20-25 minutes)**

### **Characters for monologues:**

1. Esther E. (1943): Arriving in Dallas, finding no AA, deciding to start meetings in her home
2. Searcy W. (1946): First meeting at 912½ Main Street, early struggles
3. A Suburban Group founder (1946): Why they "moved out" to form a neighborhood group
4. Searcy W. (1948): Reading Bill W.'s handwritten Traditions on the airplane

**Procedure:** Facilitator or volunteer reads each monologue; after each, ask "What can we learn from this moment?"

## **Activity 5: "How to Use History in Recovery" Practical Application (20-25 minutes)**

**Opening discussion (5 min):** "Why does AA history matter for our personal recovery?"

**Small group brainstorm (12 min):** Ways to incorporate Dallas AA history into home groups

- How could your group celebrate Founders Day?
- What would a "Dallas AA History Night" meeting look like?

- What stories from old-timers should be preserved?

**Action planning (8 min):** Each participant writes ONE concrete action they will take

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## Suggested 3-hour workshop flow

| Time | Activity                                    | Duration |
|------|---------------------------------------------|----------|
| 0:00 | Welcome, Serenity Prayer, Overview          | 10 min   |
| 0:10 | Presentation: The Home Group Concept        | 20 min   |
| 0:30 | Activity 1: Timeline Exercise               | 35 min   |
| 1:05 | Break                                       | 10 min   |
| 1:15 | Presentation: Dallas AA History (1940-1960) | 25 min   |
| 1:40 | Activity 2: Then and Now Breakouts          | 25 min   |
| 2:05 | Activity 3: Personal Reflection             | 20 min   |
| 2:25 | Discussion Questions (select 5-7)           | 25 min   |
| 2:50 | Activity 5: Practical Application           | 8 min    |
| 2:58 | Closing Remarks, Responsibility Declaration | 2 min    |

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## Documentary sources and archives consulted

### Primary Sources from User's Google Drive

- "AA History Presentation & Script" (comprehensive Dallas-Fort Worth history document)
- "Presentation: History of AA in Dallas"
- RowlettAATech folder archives
- NETA65\_COPY folder archives
- DallasHistory folder documents
- Digital Library archives

## Silkworth.net Archives

- "Dallas Texas – AA History"
- "Dallas Texas – Dallas Intergroup History"
- "Chapter 5 – Groups In The U.S.: How They Began and How They Grew"
- "From The Archives Of The Fort Worth A.A. Central Office"
- "History Of AA In San Antonio"
- "The First A.A. Pamphlet" (Houston Press articles)
- "Timelines Of Historic AA Events"
- "The Jack Alexander Article"
- "Esther E. – A Flower Of The South"
- "Bill Wilson at Fort Worth, Texas 1954"

## Dallas Area Sources

- Dallas AA Central Office ([aadallas.org](http://aadallas.org)) – Official Dallas AA history
- "An Interview with Searcy W." (October 1999, D.I.A.Log newsletter)
- Preston Group archives ([prestongroup.org](http://prestongroup.org))
- NETA 65 archives ([neta65.org](http://neta65.org))

## AA World Services Publications

- "The A.A. Group...Where It All Begins" (P-16)
  - *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Big Book), Third Edition
  - "The Home Group: Heartbeat of AA" (AA Grapevine)
  - *AA Comes of Age*
  - *Pass It On*
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## Conclusion: From one woman's living room to a thousand meetings

The history of Alcoholics Anonymous in Dallas demonstrates that enduring movements are built not through publicity but through personal connection—one alcoholic helping another. **Esther E.'s living room in 1943 was the first Dallas "home group"** in every meaningful sense: a domestic space where desperate people gathered to share their experience, strength, and hope.

The contrast between Kent W.'s promotional collapse and Esther E.'s sustainable foundation provides the workshop's central teaching: AA works through attraction, not promotion. The Twelve Traditions, which Searcy W. initially thought Texas didn't need because "we love each other down here," exist precisely to protect that love from the chaos of personality-driven movements.

**Every AA group in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex today is a leaf on a tree whose roots trace directly to Akron in 1935, through Houston in 1940, to Esther E.'s home on April 2, 1943.** The people attending meetings tonight inherit the legacy of Larry J. reading the Big Book on a train, of Esther working for two years with a patient at Terrell State Hospital, of Dick P. answering the phone despite his paralysis, of Searcy W. welcoming Ebby Thacher at the Suburban Club.

The Responsibility Statement—"When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible"—was written decades after Dallas AA's founding. But Esther E. lived it before the words existed. By opening her home when there was nowhere else to go, she ensured that the hand of AA would be there for generations of Dallas alcoholics not yet born.

That hand remains extended today.

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*Report compiled from archival research in Google Drive folders (RowlettAATech, NETA65\_COPY, DallasHistory), silkworth.net historical archives, Dallas AA Central Office records, and AA World Services publications. All dates verified against multiple sources where possible. This document is designed to support a 3-hour workshop with 2 hours of presentation content and 1 hour of interactive audience involvement.*