

1939 AA in California

Hello from rainy California

Here in Southern California W.W.II had an indirect effect on the growth of AA. The first meeting in Southern California was held December 19, 1939 in Los Angeles. It was started and run by two non-alcoholics. The first real meeting run by alcoholics took place March 1940 in the Cecil Hotel in downtown LA. So you might say at that time there were 2 groups and approx. 10 members. Within one year there were 8 groups and approx. 500 members in the Southern California. By 1945 the AA population grew to 30 groups and 2,000 members. Interviews of early members contribute the growth to three things: (1) rapid transportation with the scarcity of automobiles owned by alcoholics still licensed to drive and (2) the rationing of gasoline due to World War II. (3) 1941 Saturday Evening Post article.

Up until about April 1941, the Friday night meeting was the only meeting around. Some members would drive 2 hour one way just to attend the meeting that was held in the Cecil hotel. Keep in mind there were no freeways back then. Many of these members paid very close attention on how the meeting was run and after just a few meeting they tried starting meeting in their hometowns so they would not have to make that drive each week and use up their rations.

After the Saturday Evening Post article came out in March 1941, the New York office forwarded inquires that came in from all over Southern California to the Cecil Hotel meeting. At the end of the of the meeting each week those in attendance were ask if any one was from Palm Springs or San Bernardino, or from this city or that city. If you raised your hand and gave the town you were from, you were give a stack of letters told to contact these people from your city and tell them about AA. Almost all held at least one open meeting in their town to introduce possible alcoholics to AA. As a result weekly meeting sprang up almost over night.

Hope this helps

Charles from California