

April 1948

P.O. BOX 459 IS INTERNATIONAL HUB

P.O. Box 459, just an ordinary looking Post Office box number, but into it daily flow letters postmarked all over the world. It is internationally famous because it is the address of Alcoholics Anonymous General Service Headquarters, New York City.

To many active and even ardent A.A. members, what goes on at General Service Headquarters is a mystery. Because many have inquired as to how the office functions, *The Grapevine* went snooping around and found that the only mystery to the General Service Headquarters is how it operates so smoothly, so efficiently and what is most important - so personally.

The General Service Headquarters is a service center for all Alcoholics Anonymous Groups. It is directly responsible to its Board of Trustees.

Acting as a clearing house, General Service Headquarters represents A.A. as a whole to the general public in anything of national or international nature.

It publishes and distributes A.A. literature in English and Spanish; it maintains and upholds the traditions as practiced in the groups.

Like all other A.A. groups and activities, General Service Headquarters has grown through the years. It had its beginnings in what was Bill W.'s business office over in Newark, N.J. Here Ruth H.

used to answer letters and fill orders for the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. In those days, before the groups had been organized in all parts of the world, many alcoholics dried up by mail. Personal answers to letters make up a great part of the functions of the General Service Headquarters.

It wasn't long before the business of A.A. drove other business out of the little office in Newark. It grew to such proportions that larger quarters were necessary. It was moved into offices on Vesey Street, in downtown New York.

The Vesey Street office was a luxury. It was really one large room but a slight partition made it seem like two rooms. Those who were in that office downtown say that in those days a traveler took his life in his hands to set foot in the door. He was immediately put to work! No visitor ever left the office without a stack of mail to be delivered to the post office!

About six years ago, Bobbie B. became general secretary, replacing Ruth H. At that time there were 100 groups in the whole of A.A. Now there are more than 2,000. Naturally the whole operation of the General Service Headquarters has increased tremendously.

In 1944 another move was necessary. The offices were moved into the present quarters at 415 Lexington Avenue, with five employees. Since then

the staff has grown to 16 full time employees in the General Service Headquarters, four of whom are members of AA

Into the office come approximately 200 travelers each month. Many of these travelers, who through the years have built up a friendship by mail with Bobbie B. and Charlotte L. (who came to the General Service Headquarters as associate secretary, in 1946) meet for the first time these A.A. workers who before have been only signatures on letters and bulletins.

Travelers ask all sorts of questions - and get the answers - or sound suggestions based on experience of how to proceed. And much experience has piled up since the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was written in 1939. At that time there were 100 members; now there are approximately 60,000.

One of the most common questions asked is how to open a club house, or club rooms, sponsor a radio program, and bring knowledge of the AA program to other sick alcoholics with no money.

No one in the General Service Headquarters will tell a questioner what to do or how to do it - but she will tell what happened to other groups under the same circumstances - she will tell of how a group got the where-with-all to open club rooms, how another started a radio

program, and was successful, how and why another failed. The traveling questioner can listen to the "voice of experience" and take his choice as to what would be the most practical way to proceed with his problem.

Answering these questions personally makes up the large intangible part of the services of this headquarters. Besides requests by mail there are countless telephone calls - they may be from the executive of a large corporation who has an employee with an alcoholic problem - how can he get the man hospitalized - whom can he contact. Whoever it is or whatever the nature of the call, it is answered with understanding and personally by one of the members of the General Service Headquarters staff.

These are only a few things done at the General Headquarters. *The Grapevine* will do some more snooping to tell in detail other phases of the activities here at General Service Headquarters. For instance: Did you know that more than 2,000 letters come into the office each month? We will tell you all about the mail handling next month.