

The Washingtonian Society, a movement among alcoholics of a century ago, almost discovered the answer to alcoholism. At first the society was composed entirely of alcoholics trying to help each other. The early members foresaw that they should dedicate themselves to this sole aim. In many respects, the Washingtonians were akin to AA of today. Their membership passed the hundred-thousand mark. Had they been left to themselves, and had they stuck to their one goal, they might have found the rest of the answer. But this didn't happen. Instead, the Washingtonians permitted politicians and reformers, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, to use the society for their own purposes. Abolition of slavery, for example, was a stormy political issue then. Soon Washingtonian speakers violently and publicly took sides on this question. Maybe the society could have survived the Abolition controversy, but it didn't have a chance from the moment it determined to reform America's drinking habits. When the Washingtonians became crusaders, within a very few years they had completely lost their effectiveness in helping alcoholics.

The lesson to be learned from the Washingtonians was not overlooked by Alcoholics Anonymous. As we surveyed the wreck of that movement, early AA members resolved to keep our society out of public controversy. Thus was laid the cornerstone for Tradition Ten: "Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

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