

THE ROUNDTABLE OF AA HISTORY
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Rowland Hazard (1881-1945)

Rowland Hazard was the sober alcoholic who brought the spiritual message of The Oxford Group to Ebby Thatcher. Thatcher carried the message to Bill Wilson. Wilson then based much of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous on Oxford Group principles. The rest is history; millions have recovered from alcoholism.

Hazard was born October 29, 1881 into a prominent, enormously wealthy Rhode Island industrial family. He was the oldest son of Rowland Gibson and Mary Pierrepont Bushnell Hazard.

An unbroken line of Hazard men named Rowland dates back to 1763. His grandfather and great-great-grandfather had the same name. So: he sometimes used the name Rowland Hazard III. He named one of his companies, Rowland Third, Inc.

The Hazard family's colonial roots dated back to 1635 and its members were large-scale landowners, manufacturers and people of learning in science and literature. They were respected widely as achievers and as philanthropists.

The family resided in a colony of estates at Peace Dale, Rhode Island. Oakwood was built in the 1800's by Rowland's paternal grandfather. Rowland lived from age 11 at Holly House. His Aunt Helen's home, The Acorns, was where 1941 Pulitzer Prize winning poet Leonard Bacon grew up. And, there was Scallop Shell, the home of Rowland's Aunt Caroline, on her return from serving as President of Wellesley College.

Rowland was the tenth generation of Hazards born in Rhode Island. The subject of this writing was a Yale graduate (BA, 1903). Some of his classmates called him, "Ike" or "Rowley." He sang in the varsity glee club and chapel choir and was a member of Alpha Delta Phi fraternity. Both his father and paternal grandfather had graduated from Brown University. The males on his mother's side of the family favored Yale. One of these was Eli Whitney, who invented the cotton gin.

Rowland spent the years immediately following Yale learning the various family businesses. He began at The Peace Dale Manufacturing Company, of Peace Dale, Rhode Island, a woolen mill that produced much of the family wealth. That mill had made blankets for the Army during the Civil War. Rowland then moved on to work in family industries producing coke and coke ovens, soda ash, calcium chloride and soda bicarbonate in Chicago and Syracuse, before returning to Peace Dale Manufacturing in 1906, as Secretary-Treasurer.

In October 1910, Rowland married his wife, Helen Hamilton Campbell, a Briar Cliff graduate, the daughter of a Chicago banker. They had one daughter and three sons. Two of their three sons were killed while serving with the US armed forces during World War Two.

Like many of his family, Rowland was active in Republican Party politics. He was a delegate to the 1912 national party convention, which re-nominated President William Howard Taft. Hazard was a Rhode Island State Senator from 1914 to 1916. Previously he had served as President of the South Kingstown, Rhode Island Town Council

When World War 1 began, Rowland became a civilian official of the Ordinance Department. But, he resigned later to accept a commission as Captain in the US Army's Chemical Warfare Service.

It's unclear precisely when Rowland's drinking problems began. The socially elite of that time were quite guarded about private family matters. But, relatives who were alive at the time this research began say they believe Rowland's alcohol problems began when he was quite young. These relatives note that covering up his heavy drinking was no problem for Rowland, because he was a member of the family that owned the businesses. And they conclude that he probably hit bottom hard before he decided to consult with doctors for help.

Rowland sought treatment for his rapidly progressing alcoholism from all of the major psychiatrists in the United States. None had an answer that worked. Dr. Sigmund Freud, according to legend, was too busy to take Rowland's case. So: in 1931, still drinking, at 50, Hazard traveled to Zurich, Switzerland, where he consulted Dr. Carl Gustav Jung--then considered, with the possible exception of Freud, the finest

psychiatrist in the world.

Dr. Jung treated Rowland for his drinking problem. That much is clear from Jung's correspondence with Bill Wilson, published in the AA book, "Pass It On." But, there are at least two different conclusions concerning precisely when, to what extent and at what intervals the treatment took place.

Some AA historians believe Jung treated Hazard, in Zurich, for almost a year and that Hazard then felt fully ready to return home to the United States-convicted he had solved his drinking problem, and that the solution was self-knowledge. They believe Rowland left Zurich by train and got as far as Paris before he got drunk.

Other AA historians believe Rowland returned to the United States before he drank again. It's generally agreed that Hazard returned immediately to Zurich and Dr. Jung for an explanation concerning his relapse.

But, records on file among the Hazard Family Papers in the Manuscripts Division of the Rhode Island Historical Society show that Rowland was in the United States for part of every month of 1931 and 1932, with the exception of a family trip to Europe from June 12 to September 10, 1931. During that time period, Hazard can be traced to France, on July 9, Italy on July 20 and apparently to England on August 13, 1931. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the records of the RIHS to suggest Hazard was in Switzerland at all during 1931 or '32. And RIHS officials note that the Hazard family commented quite freely, on other occasions, about Rowland's travels and treatment.

That Jung treated Rowland Hazard hardly seems in dispute. In his published correspondence with Bill Wilson, Jung said he treated him. But, the RIHS records make it appear unlikely that the treatment was seven days per week, for an entire year. It is possible the treatment took place over a one-year period, but was intermittent.

At the conclusion of treatment, following Hazard's relapse, Jung told Rowland that he had done everything he could for him, clinically. He told the despondent Hazard that psychiatry and medicine could do nothing more for him and that his only hope would be to have what the psychiatrist called a "vital spiritual experience." Dr. Jung further suggested that Rowland find what we would now call a "self-help group" to help him have such an experience.

Hazard joined The Oxford Group, a spiritual, evangelical group founded on first-century Christian principles and practices (prayer, meditation, and guidance). The Group was then at the height of its success and popularity in Europe. Through attending meetings and practicing the group's beliefs, Rowland had a conversion experience such as Dr. Jung had described, an experience that released him from the obsession/compulsion to drink. (There is disagreement among A.A. historians over whether Rowland's spiritual experience happened in Europe or the US. Most believe it happened in Europe.)

Some psychiatric experts call it a blessing that Dr. Freud was too busy to see Rowland. They say it's fortunate he consulted Dr. Jung. They point out that while Jung insisted the solution to Rowland's alcoholism was spiritual, a turning to God, a conversion experience: Freud would have condemned any such spiritual experience as a neurosis.

In the United States, Hazard connected with The Oxford Group in New York, led by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Shoemaker, at the mission of Calvary Episcopal Church, on 23rd. Street, in Manhattan.

In 1932, Rowland moved to Shaftsbury, Vermont. There, during August 1934, he heard from two other Oxford Groupers about Edwin Throckmorton "Ebby" Thatcher's pending six-month sentence to Windsor Prison for drunkenness and alcoholic insanity.

Hazard and fellow Oxford Grouper Ceebra Graves attended Ebby's sentencing hearing in court at Bennington, Vermont.

There are two conflicting accounts of what happened next. The first version says they told the presiding judge, Judge Collins Graves, Ceebra's father, of their group's success in controlling alcohol problems and asked the Court to release Ebby to Rowland's custody. This version says Judge Graves consented. The second version says it was Judge Graves who asked Hazard to take Ebby under his wing and that Rowland consented. Both versions conclude the same way: that Ebby was released to Rowland's custody and, Rowland, Ceebra and a third Group member, Shep Cornell, began taking Ebby with them to Oxford Group

meetings in Vermont.

Ebby moved with Rowland to New York, later in 1934. And, it was there, during late November 1934 that Ebby Thatcher, sober approximately two months, brought the message of recovery from alcoholism through the principles of The Oxford Group, to Bill Wilson, in Wilson's kitchen, at 182 Clinton Street, Brooklyn Heights. That visit would result, approximately seven months later, in the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Yet, Rowland Hazard, who played such a major part in AA's birth, returned to drinking. Records of the Hazard family indicate he was treated in 1933-1934 by the well-known lay therapist Courtenay Baylor.

In August 1936, the Hazard family paid to have Rowland brought home to Rhode Island from his ranch in Alamogordo, New Mexico, because his drinking had become still more serious. Rowland apparently consented. His younger brother, Thomas, authorized the use of funds from the family-owned Aguadero Corporation to cover the expenses.

But, later events tempt one to conclude that Rowland must have stopped drinking, again, at least for a time. From 1938 to 1939 he was associated with an engineering firm, Lockwood-Greene Engineers, Inc. From 1940 to 1941 he was an independent consultant. In 1941 he became vice-president and general manager of the Bristol Manufacturing Company of Waterbury, Connecticut. (Bristol was a leading manufacturer of industrial measuring and recording devices.)

Rowland Hazard died of a coronary occlusion, (a heart blockage) on Thursday, December 20, 1945, while at work in his office at Bristol Manufacturing. He was 64. The fact that he was a top executive of a major corporation at the time of his death suggests that Rowland had stopped drinking again. Nonetheless, some A.A. historians question whether he died sober.

He had stayed active in The Oxford Group and remained in the group after it changed its name to Moral Rearmament (MRA) in 1938. Some early AA members said they knew Rowland because he sometimes visited the old 24th. Street clubhouse, which Bill, Lois and others had established during early June 1940 in a former stable at 334½ West 24th Street, in Manhattan. But, there is no evidence that Rowland Hazard ever joined AA.

SOURCES: AA publications "Alcoholics Anonymous", "Pass It On" and "The Grapevine" (May 1995); The Hazard Family Papers, Manuscripts Division of The Rhode Island Historical Society and Rick Stattler, Curator; "Not-God" by Ernest Kurtz; "Ebby The Man Who Sponsored Bill W." by Mel B; "Lois Remembers" by Lois Burnham Wilson; "Bill W." by Francis Hartigan; The Archives of the AA General Service Office and The Providence Journal.

I'm very grateful for the above sources. Any mistakes are my own.

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