

US Copyright Law and the Big Book of AA

It is illegal for anyone to violate any of the rights provided by the copyright code to the owner of copyright. These rights, however, are not unlimited in scope. [Sections 107 through 120](#) of the 1976 Copyright Act establish limitations on these rights. In some cases, these limitations are specified exemptions from copyright liability.

NOTE: Before 1978, statutory copyright was generally secured by the act of publication with notice of copyright, assuming compliance with all other relevant statutory conditions. U.S. works in the public domain on January 1, 1978 (for example, **works published without satisfying all conditions for securing statutory copyright under the Copyright Act of 1909**) remain in the public domain under the current act.

For information on International and US Copyright Law and Research see: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright>

1. WORKS FIRST PUBLISHED OR COPYRIGHTED

BETWEEN JANUARY 1, 1920, AND DECEMBER 31, 1949, BUT NOT RENEWED: Applies to 1st Edition

- If a work was first published or copyrighted between January 1, 1920, and December 31, 1949, it is important to determine whether the copyright was renewed during the last (28th) year of the first term of the copyright.
- This can be done by searching the Copyright Office records or catalogs, as explained above.
- **If no renewal registration was made, copyright protection expired permanently on the 28th year date it was first secured.**
- Under the Copyright Act of 1909 the ownership of a copyright could only be transferred in whole, and not in part. If the copyright owner assigned anything less than the entire copyright such transfer was only recognized as a license and not an assignment. The owner of the entire copyright was called the “copyright proprietor”.

2. Works Originally Created Before January 1, 1978,

But Not Published or Registered by That Date Does not apply to AA literature

Works that were created but not published or registered for copyright before January 1, 1978, have been automatically brought under the statute and are now given Federal copyright protection. The duration of copyright in these works will generally be computed in the same way as for works created on or after January 1, 1978: **the life-plus-50** or 75/100-year **terms** will apply to them as well.

3. Works Originally Created

and Published or Registered Before January 1, 1978 Manuscript, 2nd Edition

Under the law in effect before 1978, copyright was secured either on the date a work was published or on the date of registration if the work was registered in unpublished form. In either case, the copyright endured for a first term of 28 years from the date it was secured. During the last (28th) year of the first term, the copyright was eligible for renewal.

- The Copyright Act defines publication as follows:

Publication is the *distribution of copies* or phonorecords *of a work to the public by sale*** or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending.

- For works first published on and after March 1, 1989, use of the copyright notice is optional, though highly recommended. Before March 1, 1989, the use of the notice was mandatory on all published works. Otherwise Copyright was permanently gone.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
Copyright Office
of the United States
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that a careful search in the indexes and catalogs of the Copyright Office covering the period 1898 through 1945 under the names Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc.; Cornell Press, Inc.; and Works Publishing Company and the title (where available) ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS disclosed the following separate registration for a work identified under these names and this specific title:

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS; the story of how more than one hundred men have recovered from alcoholism, by William G. Wilson. Registered in the name of Works Publishing Co. (Appl. claimant: Wm. G. Wilson, trading as Works Publishing Co.), under A 128036 following publication April 10, 1939.

Search in the Renewal Indexes under the above names and title failed to disclose any renewal registration relating to this entry.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the seal of the Copyright Office is affixed hereto on February 8, 1985.

Donald C. Cuzzan
Acting Register of Copyrights

James C. Roberts

By: James C. Roberts
Head
Reference & Bibliography Section

The copyright for the First Edition of "Alcoholics Anonymous"
was registered April 1, 1939.

No renewal was made, thus it is public domain since end of 1967.

The 2nd Edition copyright was registered 1955.
Published: [N.Y., N.Y.] : Alcoholics Anonymous, [1946]- .
LC Call No. : HV5275 .A53
Author: [W., Bill]
Title: Alcoholics Anonymous; the story of how many
thousands of men and women have recovered from alcoholism.
Published: New York, Alcoholics Anonymous Pub., 1955.
LC Call No. : HV5275 .W15 1955

No renewal was made, thus it is public domain since end of 1983

A.A. copyrights

I am grateful for this time on your program to mention several matters connected with copyrights of our literature and our logos. I hope that your committee discussions may have touched on some of them.

I would like to review briefly how the U.S./Canada office treats its copyrighted literature. We grant exclusive permission to the General Service Boards of other countries to reprint our copyrighted literature, after certain preliminaries are satisfied. In connection with Bill Wilson's writings, we do this only after we check the English language version or the translation that is proposed to be published. This is particularly the case with the Big Book and the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions.

Of course, as you may be aware, the copyright on the first and second editions of the Big Book is no longer in force anywhere except in Canada. Nevertheless, we ask the Fellowship worldwide to act, as we do, as though the copyright were still in force.

When the translation is done it should be, of course, copyrighted and the copyright assigned to A.A. World Services in New York. The appropriate forms have been sent to all G.S.O.s.

Regarding our other material, we do not insist that translations be checked by our office, but rely on the General Service Board of the country in question to do that.

I think these matters are becoming increasingly important. We are getting more and more requests to translate the Big Book; both with regard to very wide audiences, such as Russian, or very small ones, such as specific Native American languages.

Problems are sometimes associated with these requests beyond strict copyright matters, often related to support for the translating effort or the publication. It seems we should always be seeking to make this basic text of A.A. universally available. Not the least of the reasons other groups want the Big Book in their languages is its symbolic value as the "bible" of A.A.

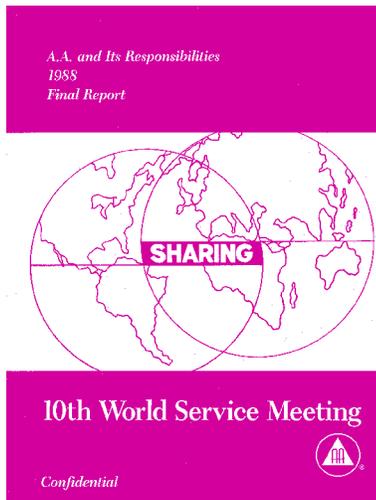
John Bragg

**10th WSM 1988, Page 23, J.Bragg= A.A.W.S.
director & GSO General Manager**

[Comment:] The underlined sentence "**to act as though it were still in force**" is shocking, because it is a **command to be dishonest.**

Anyhow it was executed by AA General Service Offices in

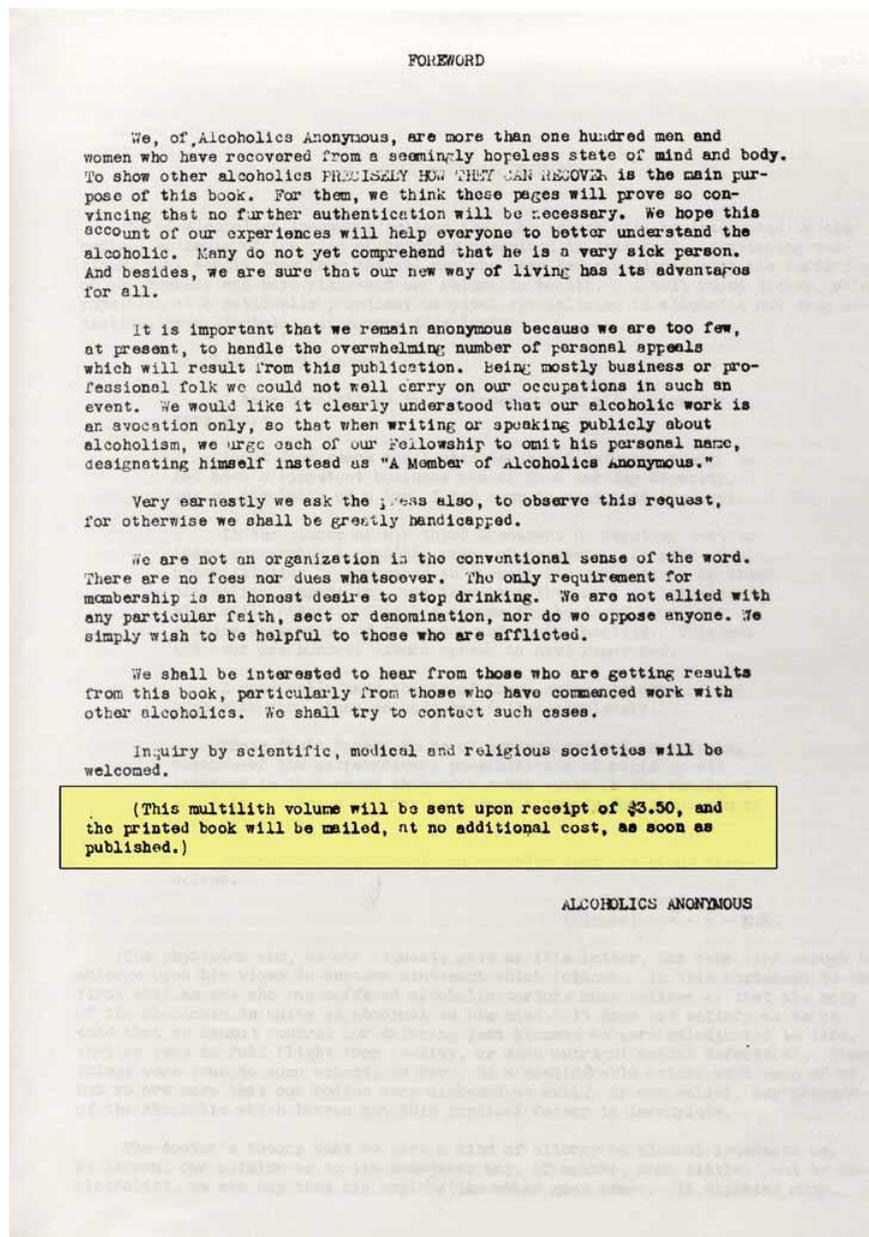
- USA,
- Mexico,
- Germany,
- Sweden and



- Finland and
- probably elsewhere.
 - Attorneys were paid with money (stolen!) from the 7th Tradition basket and in Mexico after an public controversy one AA member was sentenced by court to one year of prison under the accusation of "copyright infringement". These events were not caused by spiritual AA principles but by the desire of paid AA leaders for money, property and prestige.

The Original Manuscript (multilith draft) of the Big Book was given away for free and sold for \$3.50 in 1938/39 without any copyright notice.

Thus it was public domain from the very start...



For further information about the limitations of any of these rights, consult the copyright code or write to the Copyright Office. Created: 1996 Updated: March 3, 1998