

Rowland Hazard (1881-1945)

*“A certain American business man had ability, good sense and high character.”
(There Is A Solution, Chapter Two, pg.26:1)*

“In an matter of fact way (Ebby) told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his sentence.” (Bill’s Story, Chapter One, pg. 9:6)

Rowland Hazard played a crucial role in our history. He was the sober alcoholic who brought the spiritual message of The Oxford Group to Ebby Thacher who then carried the message to Bill Wilson. The rest is well known history.

But who was Rowland Hazard?

He was born October 29, 1881 into a prominent, enormously wealthy Rhode Island industrial family. 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.

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 and had previously served as President of the South Kingstown Town Council (Rhode Island).

Rowland sought treatment for his rapidly progressing alcoholism from all of the major psychiatrists in the United States. None had an answer that worked. So, he decided to see the best European Psychiatrists that his money could buy. Dr. Sigmund Freud, his *first* choice, was not taking any new patients. And his *second* choice, Dr. Alfred Adler 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, his *third* choice.

After about a year under Dr. Jung’s care, Rowland left for home thinking his newly found self awareness was his salvation. It wasn’t. He relapsed and returned to Dr. Jung. Jung said 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.”

Soon afterwards, in England, Hazard found his way to 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.

That Hazard was treated by Jung rather than Freud or Adler is very significant. Had he been accepted by either of them, A.A. might never have happened. You see Jung and Adler were students of Freud's, but Jung eventually had a serious falling out with his mentor and contemporary over one particular point. Freud and Adler believed that *ALL* problems could be solved thru psychoanalysis. Jung believed that *some* cases (chronic alcoholics) required a spiritual conversion. Freud and Adler condemned so-called "spiritual experiences" as a form of neurosis.

Once back 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, 61 Gramercy Park North (off 23rd Street) in Manhattan.

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

Hazard and fellow Oxford Grouper Cebra Graves attended Ebby's sentencing hearing in court at Bennington, Vermont. The presiding judge, Judge Collins Graves (Cebra's father) released Ebby to Rowland's custody and along with a third Group member, Shep Cornell, began taking Ebby with them to Oxford Group meetings in Vermont.

Now sober, Ebby moved with Rowland to New York later that year. And, it was there, in late November 1934 that Ebby Thacher, 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 again treated for his alcoholism in 1934-1935 by the well-known lay therapist Courtenay Baylor.

In 1941 he became Vice-President and General Manager of the Bristol Manufacturing Company of Waterbury, Connecticut. The factory, inactive and unoccupied since 1988, still stands at 40 Bristol Street in Waterbury.

Rowland Hazard died of a coronary occlusion, (heart blockage) on Thursday, December 20, 1945, while at work in his office at Bristol Manufacturing. He was 64.

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 he sometimes visited the old 24th Street clubhouse, which Bill, Lois and others had established in June 1940 in a former stable at 334½ West 24th Street, in Manhattan.

But, there is no evidence that Rowland Hazard ever joined AA.