

Why We Call It “The Big Book”

A printer in Cornwall, NY, named Edward Blackwell, had been highly recommended to Bill Wilson. Blackwell was the President of Cornwall Press. So Bill and Hank Parkhurst (author of the personal story "The Unbeliever" in the first edition of the Big Book) went to Cornwall to see Blackwell. There they were told that the book would probably be only about four hundred pages when printed. That seemed a bit skimpy. They wanted to sell the book for \$3.50 per copy. That was a very large sum in those days; probably the equivalent of about \$50 today, and people might not think they were getting their money's worth.

They picked the cheapest, thickest paper the printer had, and requested that each page be printed with unusually large margins surrounding the text. This made for an unusually large book. Thus, the book came to be nicknamed the "Big Book."

A reproduction of the first printing can be purchased today and it is much taller and thicker than our current Big Book, although it has fewer pages.

Blackwell had an excess of red material for the bindings, so he offered them a special deal. Eager to save costs, Bill and Hank agreed. They also thought, according to some reports, that the color red would make the book more attractive and marketable.

The first printing was the only one on which a red binding was used. All the other printings of the first edition, except for the fourth printing, were in various shades of blue. The fourth printing, due to another overstock of binding material and thus, lower cost, was bound in blue as well as in green.

Despite all their efforts at proofreading, there was a typographical error in the first printing. On page 234, the second and third line from the bottom was printed twice. This was corrected in subsequent editions.

A New York AA member named Ray Campbell, a recognized artist, was asked to design the dust jacket. His story, "An Artist's Concept", appears in the Big Book's first edition. He submitted various designs for consideration including one which was blue and in an Art Deco style. The one which was chosen was red, and yellow, with a little black, and a little white. The words Alcoholics Anonymous were printed across the top in large white script. It became known as the circus jacket because of its loud circus colors. The unused blue jacket is today in the Archives at the Stepping Stones Foundation.

