

Fifteenth Annual National A.A. Archives Workshop



The podium at the National Archives Workshop. Events were held in the Wingate by Wyndham Hotel and the Gateway Convention Center.

The National Archives Workshop was held in Helena, Montana, September 22–25, with 144 attendees. The theme this year was “Mining Our Past — Minding Our Future.” The event brings together Area Archivists, as well as the General Service Office Archivist, for a series of presentations, talks and sharing of information on a national level. This was the 15th annual event, sharing methods, procedures and enthusiasm.

Friday night saw a presentation by Michelle Mirza (non-alcoholic), G.S.O.’s Archivist, who gave a power-point tour of the G.S.O. collection, followed by a “Long-Timer” panel, consisting of four A.A. members with a combined 183 years of sobriety, who shared about what A.A. was like for them in the beginning.

Gerry R., Archivist for Area 40 (Montana), was the chair of the 2011 Workshop. Gerry says that archival work “really raises the level of gratitude. One of my first experiences as Area Archivist was going through material and seeing the names of friends and family and seeing how connected I am to this thing. I still get goose bumps.”

Gerry stresses the importance of “getting stories before they are gone.” He adds, “We come together at these Workshops to share our information. The parallel between the Fellowship and the individual is so important — we have to remember what it was like on an individual level and then

take that to the Fellowship. What good would we be doing if we didn’t remember what it was like? It’s the only way we’ll be able to carry this message.”

The 16th Annual A.A. Archives Workshop will be held in Cocoa Beach, Florida, October 4–7, 2012. The theme will be “Pass It On.” For further information, you can contact the planning committee at (386) 214-5446, or, naw2012@yahoo.com.

Shared Experience from Area 72 — Western Washington

I was in my last year as Area Archivist when I learned about an Archives Workshop being held in Akron, Ohio. I knew nothing about this other than to write to the Akron Intergroup and ask for information. This I did, and I went to my first workshop. I saw and experienced all the places I had read about in our literature, and I felt I was truly home. There I learned that there were other archivists like myself who knew very little about our history and how to preserve it. I met a wonderful man from Little Rock, Arkansas, who just astounded me and showed me wonderful things, like how to conserve paper and repair our books that were falling apart.

The workshop also taught me that by talking with other archivists from around the nation, I would begin to answer those questions that had been on my mind for years. That first National A.A. Archives Workshop (NAAAW) opened my eyes to a remarkable understanding of Archives. I fell in love with that workshop and have attended every one since. Each year I learned more and made new friends from around the world, who like myself thirsted for knowledge of our past. I began a journey that I hope never ends. Each year brought us new panels and speakers, who broadened our knowledge of A.A.’s scope and great history. I eventually asked to help that wizard from Arkansas, who became and still is my mentor. In 2007, after ten amazing years, he stepped down and I was asked to take over the job of Conservator for the NAAAW.

It is a great honor to teach other archivists this special trade. Every year I see our books and documents begin to deteriorate. After they are gone what will we have to show future members of our Fellowship?

I learned from that first workshop, that to take loving care of our treasures ensures their survival. After my rotation was up as Area Archivist I returned to my district and to this day continue to protect and share with fellow members our great and wonderful history. That love I have of the past and that sense of belonging has grown greater after many years as an archivist. I continue to learn and share that knowledge with others. In doing so my district's archives have grown and become a fount of enlightenment for the members in my area. I owe it all to A.A. and that wonderful Archives Workshop.

Dave C., Conservation (NAAAW)

Preservation Information Piece

We recognize the challenges encountered in doing archival work in your area or district. Some of the more frequently asked question we receive from the local A.A. archivists are: How to organize and arrange records; how to preserve archival materials; how to exhibit materials; and copyright issues.

As a result of your expressed need, the 2011 Conference Archives Committee requested that the trustees' Archives Committee develop an informational piece on basic archival preservation procedures to help local area or district archivists. We are happy to report that the piece was developed by the G.S.O. Archives staff and approved by the trustees' Archives Committee at their meeting in October.

The information paper contains helpful sections on Handling Archival Material; Processing Archival Materials, including newspaper articles, oversized records, bound volumes and folded or rolled documents; How to Care for Records; Tips on Exhibiting Materials; and much more.

In the future we will also be working on other guides, which will address: Arranging Records; Preserving History Found in Newspapers; Preserving Photographs; A Guide to Archival Exhibitions.

For free copies of this service piece, please contact the G.S.O. Archives at 212-870-3400, or e-mail: archives@aa.org. It is also available as a free download in the "Archives and History" portal of the A.A. Web site, www.aa.org.

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Chicago Looks at Her History

On July 12, 1960, "after a thorough discussion," the Chicago Area Finance Committee assigned Earl T. (1899-1962) the task of drafting a history of Alcoholic Anonymous in the Midwest and Chicago. Nothing is known of what became of that project, but 50 years later the Chicago Archives Committee resolved to finish the task begun by Earl, the first sober member of the Chicago Group.

In the summer of 2010, the Chicago Archives felt it had the necessary pieces in order to create a readable and accurate account of Chicago's rich history. We had assembled a solid group of committed members who devoted at least two days a month in working sessions at our Chicago Area Service Office (CASO). In addition to identifying and sorting a majority of the documents from our early years, members also attended the regular Wednesday monthly meeting. As our work progressed it became clear that this special project would require additional funds in our budget.

Shortly after we submitted this request, along with our yearly budget needs, we were contacted by the chair of our finance committee. He asked us to create a formal proposal to submit in January of 2011 to gauge interest in pursuing this project. Our committee spent several weeks brainstorming to think of all the elements needed for the project, as well as obstacles we might encounter. In addition to identifying a nonmember historian to serve as editor/researcher, we crafted a detailed proposal, which we submitted in person to the Finance Committee. All members of the Chicago Archives showed up in support of the project and, as we collectively held our breaths, our proposal did not meet any negative remarks. The next step would be to bring this proposal out to the Fellowship for discussion and vote. At the Chicago Area Service Assembly (CASA) meeting we answered questions about the potential of the proposed book manuscript and our plans to honor A.A. traditions. Much to our delight, the full committee gave its approval on March 20, 2011.

In terms of scope, the Chicago Archives has one of the largest A.A. holdings. Our correspondence files date back to 1939, the year "Earl T. and the Earlytimers" first met in his apartment in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb located along the shores of Lake Michigan, just north of the city. Within a few months, the group was meeting in downtown Chicago, and by May 1941 it had opened the first central office in the country. The Chicago Group's records, established by Grace Cultice (nonalcoholic), our first secretary, include early Group membership lists, correspondence, telegrams, photos, books and magazines, Grapevines and other newsletters, pamphlets and directories. Our roots reach back to Akron and New York and extend outward to Minnesota, Milwaukee, Madison, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and parts of Oklahoma.

According to a document entitled “Chicago Area Highlights,” created by Beth B., a former area delegate, the Archives originated in 1973 as an ad-hoc committee. The memo makes clear that the Archives Committee established its policies and procedures based on the General Service Office (G.S.O.) guidelines. Our first Archives Committee chairperson was Tom D., and we have had two since, Jim E. (1989) and Carol O. (2009-present). The Archives Committee was established as a special committee and has limited rotation due to the time it takes to acquire expertise. Its responsibility includes safeguarding the materials and providing ongoing training for members. Preserving the past will serve the future of A.A. and ensure that the contents of the archives will be used to maximum capacity and potential. The Archives Committee feels strongly that by following the path Earl took in getting approval, and by going through the appropriate structural channels, we have continued the Traditions established in A.A. and upheld by early members here in Chicago.

In addition to ongoing interactions with G.S.O., members of the Archives Committee also receive professional support from the Society of American Archivists (SAA). We have maintained a presence at and hosted the National A.A. Archives Workshop. Members of our committee have volunteered to assist the G.S.O. Archives at the International Conventions by sitting at their tables, greeting visitors, handing out materials, and answering questions. All of these efforts have been designed to serve our Fellowship and create and maintain relationships in the A.A. Archives community.

In recent years, the Archives Committee has worked with Chicago Area Service Office (CASO) to bring our shared history to life by providing photos, display cases and duplicates of other archival materials that can be viewed by all who visit us at our offices. Our outreach includes offering traveling display boards that can be borrowed and setting up displays at some of the major conferences in our area, including the Illinois State Convention, Second City Roundup, and the We Are Not Saints Conventions. We have offered to host workshops designed to help other area service committees create display boards of their own.

As we proceed on the book project, our committee will continue its work of sorting documents and creating a searchable database. Some of the materials are quite old and fragile and the Archives Committee will be scanning them and preserving the originals. Our tentative goal is to have a draft manuscript by March 2012 and we are very interested in receiving any material that relates to the early Chicago story, 1939 to 1960. About ten years ago our committee received a phone call from a relative of Dr. Silkworth who wondered if A.A. had any interest in his desk. Did we! After making arrangements, we authenticated the desk and sent it to New

York A.A. World Services Archives, where it is now prominently displayed. Both past chairs of the Chicago Archives had the good fortune to travel to New York to the General Service Office to meet with the archivist and, of course, visit the desk, which appears quite happy in New York!

If you have A.A. material that will help us tell the Chicago story, please contact Carol O. at pandabird@clear.net or Laura Gonzalez, the office manager of Chicago Area Service Office, at CASO@chicagoaa.org In return, we will be happy to answer any questions you might have about our archival project.

Carol O., Area Archivist

A Survey About Your Collection

I've been participating on the archives committee we have in Colorado for several years. I am a librarian by education with an MLS.

I'd like to ask if other archivists might provide me with some information about their archival collection. I hope your experience will help to make Area 10's archives better.

First, though, I should describe what we have in Colorado.

Two men, one an Al-Anon member and the other an A.A. member, collaborated in 1980 to start archival collections in both Area Fellowships. People across the area began digging out items to contribute. In 1991, the area was able to rent a medium-sized room in the basement of a centrally located church in downtown Denver, where we remain today. Prior to this time our archival material was scattered around the area in garages and central offices. The Area funds the rent (\$600 a year) and a small (\$1,200 a year) stipend for expenses.

The collection consists primarily of Area 10 records. Some of these documents go back to the late 1940s. We have a few artifacts and some out-of-area items. We have about 10 file cabinets full of items, mostly filed by type (delegate records, committee records, etc.). We also have several hundred audio tapes of speakers and oldtimer interviews. The materials have been sorted into like categories but have not been cataloged.

Five years ago, we started scanning items into PDF files, but it has been a slow process. We are using a product from Nuance named PAPERPORT, which scans into searchable PDF files. We're using public domain software to convert audio cassettes and CDs to MP3 files. We have discussed putting some of this on a Web site but there has been no clear decision yet.

The Area has discussed adding an archivist for some years, but until this year there has not been one. Instead, there has been a rotating Archives chair who is part of the area committee. This position rotate every two years with the rest of the area committee.

This year, the archives committee chose to select an archivist to serve a four-year term. As archivist, I am not a member of the area committee but they are my primary reference clients. The archives committee is still working out some details, of course, but the collective view seems simple.

The archivist is responsible for the archival collection, guided by the collection policies developed by the committee. The archivist would also act as the reference librarian to help with research. The Archives chair focuses on making the area aware of what archives are; what the collection can offer; and what needs the archives may have. The chair is also the voting member of the area committee. We have talked about the need to add a third leg to our committee — that being a Historian who would develop materials of interest to our area.

I have worked in libraries many years ago, and have also been, a library consultant, setting up special libraries for several companies. In these libraries I have used a variant of the OCLC (Ohio College Library Consortium) cataloging system which uses a combination of words in the title to form a catalog number.

One of my first goals is to develop a cataloging system which is easy to use by committee member volunteers. I would like to move the system into a computer based naming system so that there is a correlation between the catalog number and the file naming convention used for the scanned documents as we continue along that path. My current design looks like this:

Category/Year/folder_name/document_number
ABM (Area Business Minutes)/1981/Spring/0001

So, in a nutshell, this is the Area 10 (Colorado) archives collection and its current status. I'm hoping you might provide some information about your collection. I will share with you any information I receive after I compile it. These are the questions I have.

1. Do you have a catalog/index system?
 - a. What does it look like if you do?
 - b. Do you use a computer-based indexing system?
2. What does your archival collection consist of?
 - a. Do you collect artifacts?
 - b. materials outside your area?
 - c. flyers and group event materials?
 - d. AV materials? What formats?
3. How is your archival collection managed?
 - a. Do you have an archivist?
 - b. Does he/she rotate or is the archivist permanent?
 - c. How long does this trusted servant serve?
 - d. Does the archivist serve on the area committee?
Is the archivist a voting member of the area?
 - e. What does your committee look like and how does it function?
 - f. Who are the "clients"?
4. How are you funded?
5. Are you converting to an digital copy of your items?
 - a. What product are you using to scan your documents?
 - b. What about audio products? (We are using Audicity share ware here.)
6. Is any of your collection available via a computer based delivery system?
 - a. How is access controlled?
 - b. Do you have a Web site for research or retrieval of documents?
 - c. What about audio tapes — old times and/or speaker tapes?

So, in advance, thanks again for taking the time to respond to my questions. I'll tabulate the responses and send back the results, unless you tell me to leave your information out. I'm very excited by the possibilities of this shared experience.

You may e-mail me at fred@dudden.com.

Fred D., Archivist, Area 10