

MARKINGS

YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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c/o G.S.O., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115

A Magical Land Called A.A.

Farewell talk in 1977 by Robert H. on his retirement as chairman of General Services. He had also been general manager from 1968 to 1974.

Because this is my 15th and final General Service Conference, it's an emotional experience for me. This talk will be my last Conference talk.

I am not going to refer to our Conference theme, except for one comment: Perhaps it doesn't go far enough. The A.A. group, for me, is not only where it begins, but where it ends as well.

I wish I had the time to thank individually everyone to whom I'm personally indebted. Perhaps the best I can do is to say to you all, as did the Arab in Bill's last message, "I thank you for your lives." For without your lives, I would have had none; without you, there would have been no me.

I came into A.A. in 1942. I'm glad I did, because there were giants abroad in those days. Bill and Dr. Bob were in their prime; Dr. Silkworth and Sister Ignatia were sobering up drunks by the hundreds; and Bernard Smith was showing us all how indispensable our Class A trustees are. They and most of their associates are gone now. But, fortunately, two of these remarkable men remain – Dr. Jack and Austin M. They've been towers of strength in A.A. for many years. They have seen more A.A. history made than the rest of us put together. We can only read about A.A.'s past; these two lived it, helped to make it. Cherish them as an irreplaceable Fellowship asset. We will not see their like again.

The other person I have to thank by name is Bob P. Thanks to his patience, tolerance, and understanding, our personal relationship has been almost entirely free of strain. Bob has given me a precious gift – peace of mind about G.S.O. This makes it easy for me to sign off. I know I could not leave G.S.O.'s affairs in better hands.

A few years ago, our Conference had as its theme "Service – the Heart of A.A." Our staff members are the heart of service. Working with these wonderful women has been the greatest pleasure and a unique privilege of my A.A. life. I will always be grateful to them for having taught me so much, and for so much help and A.A. love. Nor can I let this opportunity pass without thanking our nonalcoholic friends and co-workers, Kleina and Madeline and Dennis, and all the others. Their contributions largely unrecognized, they have played an indispensable role in our office and our Fellowship. They have given me the gift of their friendship and love.

I've had the privilege of knowing, meeting, seeing, or hearing 104 of the 115 trustees who have served our Fellowship. I have known about 90 of them well, having worked with them. I have not known a single trustee who has not made a significant contribution to our common welfare. The best friends I have in this world are, or have been, trustees.

Over the years, I've known and worked with some 500 delegates: You're the cornerstone of the whole service structure – not just here in this room, of course, but back in your areas, where the day-to-day work lies. Actually, neither credit nor gratitude can be apportioned amongst service workers. All are essential, regardless of rank or title. The most important title in A.A. is one we rarely think of at all. And that, of course, is "A.A. member."

Sometimes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. All of us in this room – delegates, trustees, staff, and directors – are more than just the sum of ourselves. We speak for ourselves, but we also represent those who have gone before, and speak for them as well. They have passed the torch to us, as we shall pass it to service workers yet to come. So, in a larger sense, we symbolize the future, too. What we have done this week reflects the actions of many past Conferences, and what we did will affect what future Conference members do. Thus all of us are a part of the continuum of A.A. history.

Some of us are sometimes fearful of the future. We fear that this development or that problem may destroy us. Fear not, my friends. If this Fellowship ever falters, it won't be because of A.A.'s working as professionals in the field, nor "Rand type" reports, nor members with "other" problems. It will be simply because of *us* – because we can't control our own egos, nor get along well enough with each other, because we're just not wise nor good enough to hold this thing together, because we think too much about our "rights," and too little about our obligations and responsibilities. But I don't think we're going to fall apart. We are going to stick together, and keep A.A. strong and growing.

One time at a Conference, Bill asked, "Could we survive in a hostile and perilous world – should such a world some day confront us? Could we, for example, continue to function in a dictatorship?" I think we need have no fear. Let cold winds blow, if they must, and the night darken. You and I know a land where the light is bright, and there's a stillness for the spirit. A land we can live in for as long as we wish, for it exists only in our own hearts. It's a magical land called A.A. The Lord, I believe, created A.A. for us. May it be His will that we keep it safe.

Archives Find New Home

I had just become chairman of the Archives Committee when the unthinkable happened: our lease was being terminated. The new landlord was very definite. He wanted us out in 30 days — no negotiations. In February 2002, we lost our space.

Here in Mid-Southern California Area 9, many of us are proud of our extensive collection of A.A. memorabilia. We are one of three archive repositories in California, and one of only two open to the Fellowship. We have a case full of early Big Book printings, while others contain Oxford Group and Washingtonian readings, old medallions and temperance pledges for a magical journey into A.A.'s past.

Even so, and with justification, some area members have questioned the committee's large budget, considering that only about 80 non archive members visit the repository each year. Some area members had suggested the possibility of keeping some or all of the material in storage to cut costs. Others wanted them closer to the population center in Orange County. The old location had been in the area's geographical center. One veteran service member recalled that it was moved there without much discussion at the area level.



The new 700 square-foot home of the Mid-Southern California Area 9 Archives repository in the city of Riverside.

I was feeling some consternation. Less than four years sober, had I bitten off more than I could chew? We'd have to ask for an even higher rent to find a larger, cleaner space, especially if we moved closer to Orange County, where property is more expensive.

After research on possible sites and costs, the archivist, Charles K., and I met with the area executive committee to discuss the future of the repository. They expressed support for the idea of a new location. We then went to the area with a request to double the rent if needed. We promised to search in cities closer to and inside Orange County, and to find a spot accessible to all.

The area service committee put the request on the agenda. A month later the area voted unanimously in favor of

the rent increase. I relaxed, but not for long. In July, about six months after losing the old building, we decided on a 660 square foot space. The location was ideal: no windows, temperature controlled, right off the freeway, and on the first floor. I liked how laid back the landlord seemed, until he got cold feet and stopped returning our calls.

More time passed. It was approaching 10 months since we left the old location. Every space was too small, too pricey, or on the second floor and inaccessible to our older members. Our area co-hosted the National Archives Workshop in September. We'd hoped to show off our new repository, but our things were languishing in storage.

Area members started to inquire regularly about the repository's status. I was embarrassed to have to tell them we were still searching. I finally decided to stop worrying and do some footwork. Until this time, Charles (the archivist) had done everything, even though we had created a subcommittee to help him.

I set out one weekend, scribbling down every "space available" number I saw in the city of Riverside, where I live. Two possible locations emerged. One site was a converted apartment building of 700 square feet. It had separate rooms for better organization of materials, and Charles loved it. We negotiated the price down a little for a flat three-year lease. We U-Hauled our stuff out of storage in January and had an Open House in March. Excited members eager to carry the message of recovery through history have painted, polished, added light fixtures and new blinds. A member donated four new shelves for our display room.

After some frustration, then worry, and finally action, the experience was a wonderful lesson for me in turning it over and taking the next right step. Next step: Asking for money to buy a computer to catalogue, scan and store materials. Ugh!

*David S., Mid-Southern California Area 9
Archives Committee Chairman*

The Birth of a Repository: NE Ohio Area A.A. Archives

Back in 1997 at a young people's conference in Akron, Ohio, the Akron Intergroup archivist, Gail L., confronted Bob McK., then NE Ohio delegate, concerning the need for a Conference Archives Committee. She was the host of the 2nd National A.A. Archives Workshop, so she made time for him to meet with the 80 or so assembled archivists to consider the proposal. The summarized result of this meeting became part of the background material for the 1998 Conference Advisory Action which formed a Conference Archives Committee as a secondary committee.

At the end of this session Gail was asked to host the workshop again in 1998. She hesitated, explaining that the time it took to organize these events diverted her from her Intergroup Archives efforts. At this point Bob offered NE Ohio (Area 54) as a partner in this endeavor. She graciously accepted.



An inside view of the Northeast Ohio Area Alcoholics Anonymous Archives.

opportunity of an archival repository. The archives workshop had produced a healthy surplus of funds, and even after subtracting a healthy donation of startup funds for the workshop's next host, we had enough to pay for shelving and other equipment to set this up. A budget item from the area general service supplied the rest. Akron Intergroup Archives conservator, Jim B., aided us by providing and installing plastic sheeting over the dropped ceiling tiles to protect against water leaks or condensation drips.

We got the archives from Archie J., our then archivist. They came in several egg crates. While these were convenient storage boxes, they are too flimsy for archives.

Also, an egg crate full of papers weighs well over 50 pounds, too heavy for all but the sturdiest archivist. After considering archival storage boxes, we settled on legal-sized archival document cases as our standard archive box. Arrangement of material was initially difficult until we settled into a structure very similar to the "Structure of the Conference" from the *A.A. Service Manual*: members, groups, districts, area & intergroups, state, region, GSC/GSB/AAWS/GSO, etc. We've started oral histories, concentrating first on past delegates. We've carefully created our paperwork, noting the problems that occurred at other archives when they didn't have a deed of gift for a treasured item. We also adopted the Akron Intergroup Archives' acquisition policy of neither purchas-



The archives' material arrived at the new repository in egg crates. When full, the boxes weighed more than 50 pounds.

Their friendly and effective relationship did not go unnoticed. When the Akron Intergroup News Committee realized it no longer needed its room in the Intergroup Office Suite, it offered the space to general service at a modest rental. General service jumped at the chance. This not only was a good central location for our area archives' modest collection of coffee pots, office equipment, etc., but also offered us the



The banner hanging in a conference room at the Akron intergroup office depicts a timeline of A.A. literature.

ing nor bartering archives, to avoid the all-too-seductive collector mentality.

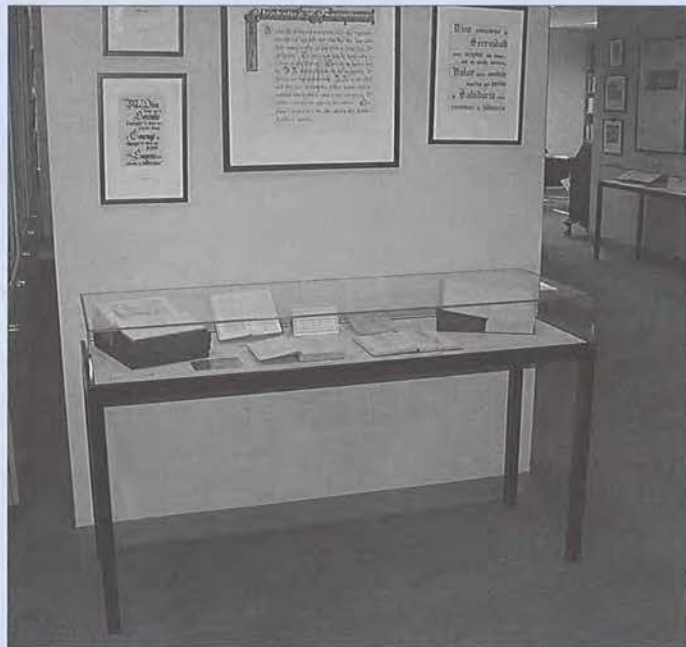
We are a part of the much larger Akron Intergroup Archives and are careful to avoid duplicating their collection. Likewise we will freely part with any "fugitive archives" (archives better suited to another area), if we become aware of their archival repository. These items belong to the Fellowship.

The Akron Intergroup's collection is bordered by two hallways that portray the development of A.A. in timeline form. Psychologist Carl Jung, whose contribution to A.A.'s program was acknowledged by Bill W., used the word "synchronicity" to describe a coincidence of events that seem to be meaningfully related. Akron's timeline details the synchronicity of about a dozen such events that led to the fertile ground for the seed of A.A. to sprout, grow, and blossom.

Our area archives' mission statement includes the task of inspiring our members. To that end we created a timeline of books and pamphlets created by our Fellowship. Our archivist, Kevin S., printed this on a long, wide banner. We let members at two of our area Mini-Conferences and at one State Convention write their initials and sobriety dates at the bottom of the banner. The purpose was two-fold: to let them know that A.A. literature creation is an ongoing effort, and to help them realize that they fit into this effort—that they are the A.A. authors of today and tomorrow.

The home for this timeline is a conference room in the Akron Intergroup Office, above which hangs the theme banner from the 1998 General Service Conference "Our Twelfth Step Work." Carrying the message is what our archives are all about. They are also there to remind us that it is we current A.A. members who have received the legacies of recovery/unity/service, and who must carry that message!

G.S.O. Archives' New Display Cases



Just inside the entrance to the G.S.O. Archives is a new display case containing examples of Temperance and Prohibition literature, as well as personal drinking stories in print before 1939, the year the *Big Book* was published.



A second new display case, under the wall where photos of International Conventions are displayed, contains Examples of A.A. Life — Then and Now. Items on display include: A journal from the 24th Street Clubhouse, New York City, early 1940s; an audiogram of Bill W.'s 1954 interview with Jim S., founder of the Cosmopolitan Group, the first African-American group in Washington, D.C.; early A.A. pamphlets; and the journal from the Ground Zero Group, which met in lower Manhattan during the weeks following 9/11.

Future *Markings* Contributors, We Know You're Out There!!!

The G.S.O. Archives Department would like to provide you with more issues of *Markings* throughout the year. In order to make this happen we need your help and your stories!

If you and/or your fellow group members would like to have your area history or personal remembrance printed in a future issue of *Markings*, please e-mail: archives@aa.org or write to G.S.O., attention Archives, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

We look forward to your contributions and more issues of *Markings*!

A.A. Service Manuals Needed:

The G.S.O. Archives' permanent collection is missing printings of the *The A.A. Service Manual* for the following years: 1956, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1970, 1972 and 1976

If you would like to contribute one of the above copies to the G.S.O. Archives' collection, please call: 212-870-2568 or write to the previously listed postal or e-mail addresses.