

## Knowing the Ins and Outs of Copyright Law Is Key for Archivists

It is important for all archivists to realize that most of the materials in archives collections are protected by copyright, and often the archives do not own those copyrights. You may own the item, but this does not mean you own the copyright as well. Copyright laws limit the way archivists can legally use the materials in their collections.



Copyright law is complex and difficult to navigate. Treat this article only as an introduction to the fundamentals of copyright regulations. It is highly recommended that you do additional research to learn more about these issues, and consult an attorney whenever embarking on a project that might involve copyright issues.

### What Is Copyright?

Copyright is a form of protection provided by the laws of federal, state, and local governments to the authors of any “original works of authorship.” These laws generally apply to works such as books, pamphlets, letters and emails, memos, newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, sound recordings, web pages, artwork, and more – even doodles and scribbles are protected by copyright. This protection is available to both published and unpublished works.

Today, one does not have to register a work’s copyright, nor print a © symbol on the work, to receive copyright protection. Protection automatically extends to any qualifying work, whether published or not, and whether created in the U.S. or in almost any country of the world. Generally, you should always assume that a work is copyrighted.

### Rights of Copyright Owners

Copyright laws generally give the copyright owner the exclusive right to do (or to authorize others to do) the following:

- Copy or scan;
- Prepare derivative works (for example, translate into another language, create a musical version of the work, create an abridged version, etc.);
- Distribute copies of the work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership;
- Public performance (for example, showing a movie at a public event, performing a play or song, etc.); and
- Public display.

It is illegal for anyone to violate any of the rights belonging to the owner of copyright. Violations may include photocopying/scanning; uploading to websites; copying software; sharing or selling audio/video files; or putting on public film exhibitions. Before you can legally do any of these things, you must in most cases have the written permission of the copyright owner.

### Who Owns Copyrights?

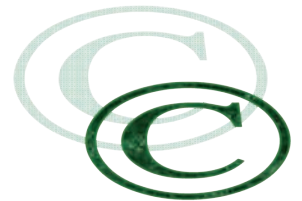
Ordinarily, the author or creator of a work is the copyright owner.

Sometimes it is easy to determine who owns the copyright. If you have a letter in your collection, for example, the author of the letter owns the copyright. In the case of a photograph, the photographer is the copyright holder.

Sometimes it is more complex. In the case of a taped talk, many people may be considered “authors” and all of them would have some right to the work: the speechwriter, the speaker, and the person taping the event.

There are exceptions to this, however. For example, if an employee creates something as part their work, generally the employer is then the copyright owner of that material.

Also, an author can transfer copyright ownership to your archives, but this requires a signed, written document, and a certain amount of legal formality.



### Copyright Protection Lasts Many Years

Most copyrights last through the life of the author, plus 70 years. When a copyright owner dies, the copyright continues as part of that person’s estate.

Most works that have remained unpublished (manuscripts, letters, etc.) are subject to the basic protection of “life plus 70 years.”

As an example, let’s say we have a letter written by John Doe who passed away in 1964. His letter will likely be protected by copyright until the year 2034.

Works published before 1978 have copyright protection for a maximum term of 95 years, though some have shorter copyright periods, and, for some, copyright restrictions that existed earlier may have already expired.

For example, perhaps you have an A.A. pamphlet produced by your local central office or Intergroup, published in 1972. This pamphlet has a statement of copyright printed on it: "Copyright 1972 by [author/owner]". It will likely be protected by copyright for 95 years after its publication, until 2067.



Eventually, a copyright will expire and the formerly protected work will fall into the "public domain," where it can be used without restriction. But for materials relating to Alcoholics Anonymous, in many cases, works will remain copyrighted for many years.

## Can You Use Copyrighted Works Without Infringement?

The rights given to copyright owners are not unlimited. The laws include numerous exceptions to the rights of copyright owners, and many allow certain uses for education and research.

The best known exception is the doctrine of "fair use," which permits works to be copied for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, or research. Fair use may be described as the privilege to use copyrighted material in a reasonable manner without the owner's consent. Examples of activities that may be excused as fair use include: distributing copies of a section of an article in class for educational purposes; using an excerpt of a film in a film review; or

creating a parody of a song. However, there are no hard and fast rules about which kinds of use are "fair" and which uses may be "infringing," so relying on fair use as a justification for copyright infringement can be risky.

Other exemptions permit libraries and archives to copy some works for their customers on a limited basis, and for the purpose of preservation. There are many other exceptions as well.

### For More Information

**Note:** *These sites have been listed for reference only. They do not imply endorsement or approval by the General Service Office Archives.*

For further information about copyright, consult the U.S. Copyright Office:

U.S. Copyright Office  
101 Independence Ave. S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20559-6000  
(202) 707-3000  
[www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)

### Other helpful resources:

Copyright Information Center  
Cornell University  
E-mail: [copyright@cornell.edu](mailto:copyright@cornell.edu)  
<http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/>  
Copyright and Fair Use  
Stanford University Libraries  
<http://fairuse.stanford.edu/>



## Questions from A.A. Members Flow into G.S.O.'s Archives

The G.S.O. Archives received more than 1,900 requests for research and information in 2007. The questions we received ranged from very simple questions with easy answers to complex questions involving hours of research. If you have a question about A.A.'s history or archives, we hope you will contact us (or one of the many other local and area A.A. archives) to find the answer. What follows are some of the most frequently asked questions we receive here at the G.S.O. Archives. More FAQs will appear in future issues of *Markings*.

**Q. Does G.S.O. have information about the history of my home group?**

**A.** G.S.O.'s Archives staff can often provide detailed information about the origins and history of groups. Of course, the amount of available information we have about a group depends on the amount of information the group has sent to G.S.O. throughout the years. But we can research group histories and usually find good information.

**Q. Who wrote Chapter 8 of the Big Book, "To Wives"?**

**A.** Bill was the author of the 'To Wives' chapter, despite the fact that it is commonly thought Lois wrote it. But, as *Pass It On* describes (page 200), Lois said, "Bill wrote it, and

*I was mad."* She added, "I wasn't so much mad as hurt. I still don't know why Bill wrote it. I've never really gotten into it—why he insisted upon writing it. I said to him, 'Well, do you want me to write it?' And he said no, he thought it should be in the same style as the rest of the book."

G.S.O.'s Archives can provide extensive historical information about A.A.W.S.'s literature and pamphlets: origins; content; editions; printings; changes; and corrections that have been made over time.

**Q. What is the history behind reading The Lord's Prayer at meetings?**

**A.** In *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* it says the prayer was used from the very beginning in the Fellowship, at least as early as 1938 and 1939. In those days there was no A.A. literature, so the early groups relied heavily on existing prayers, and on the Bible and Oxford Group literature, for inspiration and guidance.

Bill W. commented several times in his correspondence about the early use of the Lord's Prayer. In a letter to a member in 1959 he says:

*"This practice probably came from the Oxford Groups who*

were influential in the early days of A.A. You have probably noted in *A.A. Comes of Age* what the connection of these people with A.A. really was. I think saying the Lord's Prayer was a custom of theirs following the close of each meeting. Therefore it quite easily got shifted into a general custom among us."

Bill also wrote the following in a 1955 letter:

"Of course there are always those who seem to be offended by the introduction of any prayer whatever into an ordinary A.A. gathering. Also it is sometimes complained that the Lord's Prayer is a Christian document. Nevertheless, this Prayer is of such widespread use and recognition that the argument of its Christian origin seems to be a little far-fetched. It is also true that most A.A.s believe in some kind of god and that communication and strength is obtainable through his grace. Since this is the general consensus, it seems only right that at least the Serenity Prayer and the Lord's Prayer be used in connection with our meetings. It does not seem necessary to defer to the feelings of our agnostic and atheist newcomers to the extent of completely hiding 'our light under a bushel.'

However, around here, the leader of the meeting usually asks those to join him in the Lord's Prayer who feel that they would care to do so. The worst that happens to the objectors is that they have to listen to it. This is doubtless a salutary exercise in tolerance at their stage of progress."

As Bill's 1955 letter indicates, recitation of the Lord's Prayer at meetings has clearly been controversial in some circles almost since the beginning. The G.S.O. has responded to letters on this issue since the 1940s and 1950s. It has been addressed in articles in *Box 4-5-9* and the *A.A. Grapevine*, and has been addressed on occasion at the General Service Conference. For example, at the 1962 Conference, one of the Ask-It-Basket questions was: "What is the procedure for dealing with individuals who refuse to stand during recitation of the Lord's Prayer? Answer: Participation—or non-participation—in recitals of the Lord's Prayer should be considered a matter of personal conscience and decision."

#### **Q. What is the story behind the circle and triangle logo?**

**A.** The circle and triangle symbol has long been connected to the A.A. Fellowship. It was adopted as an official A.A. symbol at the International Convention in St. Louis in 1955, and from that point on was widely used in the Fellowship. For the Fellowship, the three legs of the triangle represented the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, and the circle symbolized the world of A.A. In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, Bill W.'s 1955 speech, in which he describes the adoption of the symbol, is printed:

"Above us floats a banner on which is inscribed the new symbol for A.A., a circle enclosing a triangle. The circle stands for the whole world of A.A., and the triangle stands for A.A.'s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service. Within our wonderful new world, we have found freedom from our fatal obsession. That we have chosen this particular symbol is perhaps no accident. The priests and seers of

antiquity regarded the circle enclosing the triangle as a means of warding off the spirits of evil, and A.A.'s circle and triangle of Recovery, Unity, and Service has certainly meant all of that to us and much more." (p. 139)

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, A.A.W.S. decided to phase out the use of the circle and triangle symbol on its literature, letterhead and other material. In 1994 the General Service Conference resolved that the logo be discontinued on all Conference-approved literature. However, the symbol is still associated with Alcoholics Anonymous (and other kinds of 12-Step recovery fellowships) and has a special meaning for A.A. members all over the world.

#### **Q. What are the origins of the Serenity Prayer?**

**A.** The debate over who wrote the Serenity Prayer has gone on for years, and its origins are still somewhat murky. However, it seems most likely to have been written by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, a well-known theologian who served for many years as Dean and Professor of Applied Christianity at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Alcoholics Anonymous became aware of the Serenity Prayer in 1941, when it was discovered printed in the *New York Tribune* newspaper. Ruth Hock, A.A.'s first secretary and a nonalcoholic, was immediately taken with it. The headquarters staff thought of printing the prayer on a card to distribute to A.A. members.

On June 12, 1941, Ruth wrote Henry S., a Washington, D.C.-based A.A. member and printer by profession, saying:

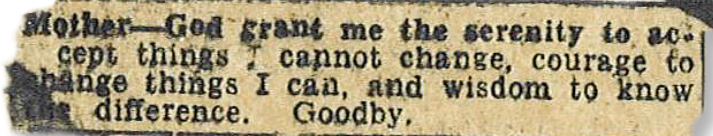
"One of the boys up here got a clipping from a local newspaper which is so very much to the point and so much to their liking, that they have asked me to find out from you what it would cost to set it up on a small card, something like a visiting card, which can be carried in a wallet... here it is... would appreciate it if you would let me know right away."

Henry answered back immediately and enthusiastically:

"...Your cards are on the way and my congratulations to the man who discovered that in the paper. I can't recall any sentence that packs quite the wallop that that does and during the day I've shown it to the A.A.s that dropped in and in each case have been asked for copies. I sent you 500 copies in as much as you didn't say how many you wanted. If you need any more, let me know. Incidentally, I am only a heel when I'm drunk, I hope, so naturally there could be no charge for anything of this nature."

Ruth responded again on June 17, and wrote:

"Your generous response to my request for the little cards is certainly much appreciated by us all up here. Glad so many of you down there liked it too, for it backs



Mother—God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Goodby.

This printing of the Serenity Prayer is from an issue of the *New York Tribune* in 1941.

*me up in my feeling that it really has ‘something.’”*

G.S.O.’s Archives can provide more information about this prayer’s historical origins upon request.

**Q: What’s the history of typical A.A. slogans like “First Things First” and “One Day at a Time”?**

**A.** We don’t have a great deal of information about the origins of A.A.’s slogans and acronyms, but we can provide some sharing and preliminary information. Many of these slogans, as with other practices in A.A., were simply passed along to other members, so it is impossible to know who started using them first. It is possible that some of the slogans may have originally stemmed from a part of the Oxford Group language, but it could also be that they were original with Bill and Dr. Bob and the early members.

Members have always inquired as to the origins of various slogans, and it has always been difficult to narrow down. In our research, we discovered a letter written by former G.S.O. Archivist, Frank M., dated 1989, who responded to a similar question posed to him. This is Frank’s response: *“Your interest in the origins of ‘One Day at a Time’ is shared by many of us. Like hand-holding, however, it’s difficult to pinpoint the exact ‘moment.’”* That is the problem we find with most of our A.A. slogans, unfortunately.

We do know, however, that many slogans commonly heard have been around since the early days of the Fellowship.

In December 1958, Ruth Hock (nonalcoholic), A.A.’s first secretary, wrote a response to a similar question concerning different slogans:

*“Bill [W.] and I first worked together in January 1936 when he had been sober just a little over one year and at that time ‘Easy Does It,’ ‘Live and Let Live,’ and ‘First Things First,’ were part of the daily conversation. They were also used in the very first drafts of the book, but probably only Bill himself could tell you where he picked them up...”*

*“As far as I’m concerned all of the above were introduced into A.A. by Bill W. himself although not original with him.*

*“Some of these could have been used in Oxford Group meetings but there is no way to know for sure.”*

In addition to Ruth’s response, page 220 of Bill W.’s biog-

raphy, *Pass It On*, also addresses this topic:

*“Some ‘A.A. saws’ were also used as long ago as the late 1930s: ‘First Things First,’ ‘Easy Does It,’ ‘Live and Let Live.’ Because these appear in the first edition of the Big Book (at the end of the chapter on ‘The Family Afterward’), it’s probable that the use of the slogans originated with Bill and that he brought them with him from Vermont – old saws with new teeth.”*

**Q. Why do A.A. members use tokens, medallions, and chips to mark sobriety? When did that practice start?**

**A.** The chip system is thought to have begun in Indianapolis in 1942. The tradition is believed to have started with Doherty S., who introduced A.A. to Indianapolis and who said in a letter to Bill that the practice originated in that city.

Nell Wing wrote in 1962 about the history of the chip system: *“The chip system might have begun in Indianapolis....*

*reference was made in a letter from Doherty to the start of giving out ‘chips’ and ‘tokens.’ This was in 1942. I imagine this would be about right, because most of the early groups started in 1940 and it would take about a couple of years to think of anniversaries and marking any time of sobriety. I asked Bill about this and his memory is that the system started in Indianapolis.”*



*Sister Ignatia gave these medallions to newly released alcoholic patients of St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio.*

In *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, it indicates that Sister Ignatia in Akron, working at St. Thomas Hospital, also used medallions: *“Sister Ignatia gave each of her newly released patients a Sacred Heart medallion, which she asked them to return before they took the first drink. She would occasionally give out St. Christopher medals as well.”* (page 195).

We don’t know precisely who started this system, or when and how it spread to other groups. As with many things in A.A., the exact nature of the history eludes us.

## Extra Copies of General Service Conference Reports Still Available

The G.S.O. Archives still has hundreds of extra copies of Final Reports from the General Service Conferences that we want to give away to Archives that need them.

Most of the earliest Conference Reports have already been snapped up, but we have many extra reports from the 1990s-2000s. We would be happy to send them out to your district, area, or Intergroup/central office archives, free of charge.

Please inventory your collection of GSC Reports before you contact us, and create a list of the specific reports you’re requesting, so we can send you exactly what you need.

First come, first served!

Please call or email us with your request at 212-870-3400, or [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org).