

MARKINGS

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Frank M. In Memoriam

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Frank M., former G.S.O. archivist, on January 19 in Vero Beach, Florida.

Frank, sober since June 10, 1970, was widely known throughout the U.S. and Canada, as well as abroad, as a dedicated A.A. member and A.A. historian. He was a 21 year employee of the General Service Office—first as administrative assistant and, from 1982 until his retirement 13 months ago, as G.S.O.'s archivist.

In Vero Beach he was a member of the Beachside Beginners Group. When back in New York he could be found every Monday and Wednesday evening in his regular seat at the Oxford Group—his spaniel Timothy at his feet.

Members of the Oxford Group shared their memories of Frank at their Wednesday meeting the day after his passing. A rose had been placed anonymously on his empty chair. The theme running through all the sharing was Frank's ability to make everyone feel special. "You're my favorite," he would say, and "I appreciate you." "Maybe you need a bigger God," was a frequent suggestion made when someone talked to him of a problem. A memorial service was held in Vero Beach, Florida, in late January. On March 2nd his family and many A.A. friends—some from as far away as England—gathered in St. John the Divine Cathedral, New York City, to celebrate Frank's life.

Frank often referred to himself as "the Happy Archivist." In his many talks about A.A. history and the G.S.O. Archives, he emphasized the chief reason for having an archives was so "we don't forget where we've come from." His family, his many friends and those with whom he shared his strength, hope and experience of A.A. will not forget Frank.



Friday the 13th — A Lucky Day In North Carolina

On Friday, November 13, 1998, we delivered the final signed copies of the lease for the North Carolina Archives Repository to the rental agent. We are now the humble occupants of 440 square feet of space. After six years of storing materials in her home, the archivist now has a whole room in her house that will turn into — well, who knows!

In 1995 our archivist presented a "Six-Year Plan" to the area assembly. The two items for their consideration were a permanent repository and a written history of Alcoholics Anonymous in North Carolina.

As you can well imagine, red flags flew up everywhere—and they nearly all had dollar signs on them. Many said, Why do we need this? A lot of the questions were about the location. Territorial issues were raised. Some said our history should be stored in New York, not in North Carolina. Some said it would cost too much money. And there was always the question, "How will this help the still-suffering alcoholic?" And so we began to inform the area about our archival needs and the importance of a permanent repository. Prior to this time a few of us had made excursions to other repositories in our region. We hung onto this experience and began to share it in North Carolina.

Pockets of enthusiasm began to spring up all across the area. It was a new idea and, as most of us have come to realize, a new idea can often generate fear in our hearts. Each time a report was made to our area committee and assembly some new question arose. But like a miracle, the enthusiasm rose up to inspire us again. In May 1991 the assembly accepted the recommendation of the area committee to support a North Carolina Archives Committee and an archivist. As with a lot of things we do, we put the cart before the horse. A past D.C.M. in the mountains had started collecting old minutes and preparing graphs on the growth of A.A. in North Carolina, but when it came time to establish a committee, some things in his life had changed and he was unable to serve as archivist.

This author was second on the list! I was appointed archivist—to serve without rotation, no vote at committees or assemblies and no eligibility to stand for area office. So now we had a few boxes of old minutes, several boxes of cassette tapes of our meetings and an archivist. Thank heavens for Frank M., the G.S.O. archivist, who sent the handbook, the pictures and lots of encouraging letters. We tried to start a committee, but it drifted apart. We took the simple, but heavy display to every assembly and state con-

vention (and wherever else we were asked). Everywhere reports and proposals were made, and prayers were requested.

With the help of our area chairperson, we hooked up with another area archives close to North Carolina and used their experience to help us. One of the first things I borrowed from them was the group history form. In our first year we sent group history forms to all 875 groups in North Carolina. Each time we carried our display we took history forms and had them available at assemblies and conventions. We had a return of over 150 in the first year, and since that time we have gotten histories whenever we made a big push.

I've mentioned our display, let me tell you how it came about: Sponsorship, that's how! The archivist's sponsor suggested that "some of these younger women she sponsored" needed involvement in service. One was handy with tools – she is also an artist – and created our first display board. We have used it since November 1991. In 1992 an interested and generous A.A. member had display cases built for us. Along the way people have seemingly come out of the woodwork to offer help, support and prayers.

Our next challenge was transportation – getting display boards, cases and artifacts out to the groups. Our archivist and her husband purchased a minivan and we were on our way. (On one of our early trips to check out repositories, it was officially named the Archmobile.) There was still no official committee, but there were many interested persons. Folks showed interest and enthusiasm from Morehead City to Marble, North Carolina.

We've had several windfalls of treasures from individuals and groups around the state. One group called and said they had three boxes of "junk" we might like. Those three boxes have become a cornerstone of our collection, and include artifacts dating back to 1947. During our first year we started taking oral histories. I remember the first; we still have many more to do. Taking an oral history is the fun part, transcribing is the hard part, and as yet we only have two people who want to do it. Another project that has evolved is our delegate history. We are trying to catch up with our past delegates and get oral histories from them.

We began searching for space and for support following the presentation of the Six-Year Plan. In 1997 we were ready to go for it and hoped for a grand opening on January 1, 1998. But the questions were still there and it seemed like another year would be a good idea. So we proposed that one more study be done and that the area be ready to go on January 1, 1999. The pockets of enthusiasm and the silent majority rose up and the proposal for the permanent repository passed.

On January 3, 1999, a group of eight very strong backs moved the boxes and boxes and boxes of our treasures from the home of the archivist into the 440 square feet of space. The room is about 20' x 21' – with room for plotting and planning displays, for conservation and for folks who want to come in and listen to tapes. There will be room for re-

searchers to come in and study. (Once we have a policy to preserve our anonymity, that is.) So much to do! And how exciting to dig in! Sometimes I pinch myself, and say, yes, North Carolina really does have its own repository. If there are regrets, it is that our number one booster, Frank M., died 16 days after we moved in and won't have a chance to walk in the door.

As I sit writing this history I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve and the countless lessons learned. And those still to come!

*Corrine H.,
Area 51 Archivist*

Research Project on Early Black A.A.s

The following article originally appeared in Markings more than a decade ago. Harold G., who is still pursuing his research, asked that this call for assistance be reprinted. Please direct all correspondence to G.S.O. Archives, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

The initial idea began when regional trustee, Garrett T., during a sharing session one board weekend, stressed the need for a history of black members to be included in the Archives at G.S.O. He had prepared a written report on black groups and members in the Washington, D.C. area and proposed that it be expanded to include A.A. as a whole.

I was asked to continue the project. I was delighted and immediately set out to contact members who could help identify early black members and groups. As with everything in this Fellowship, the response has been tremendous, with names and groups from as far away as California, Arkansas and Illinois pouring in.

To help coordinate the data, I have enlisted some local A.A. members who have a background in social research. I have also kept in close contact with Garrett T. and have consulted with him in the preparation of a questionnaire that will be distributed along with tapes to those members who will provide an oral history. A compilation of written data will also be developed to obtain a comprehensive body of information. As the information comes in I will most probably ask for some help in organizing it into some semblance of order.

The project is fascinating—not only am I learning a particular aspect of the Fellowship's history, but my sense of A.A. as a social movement has become much more acute. But that's another story.

As the material develops, there will be the need for planning and coordinating with Archives. Also, I will make periodic reports to keep you updated. I would appreciate any ideas and thought that you might have that can help move this project forward. Thank you again.

Harold G.

Sample Questionnaire for Black A.A. History Project

For persons using questionnaires for taping, feel free to modify questions or responses to whatever feels comfortable to you. The object is to relate your experience as an A.A. member who happened to be black. This information will be catalogued and stored at the General Service Office for future reference.

Please begin by stating your *name* and the *group, city* and *state* where you are now a member.

- How did you yourself get to A.A.?
- Where did you hear about it?
- Did you have a sponsor; if so, how did it help you as a newcomer?
- What contributions did you make to the Fellowship's growth – and don't be unnecessarily modest!
- When was A.A. started in your town or area? Where were meetings held (homes, churches)?
- By whom? Were there early members who especially contributed to the growth and success of the group?
- How were they started: i.e. offshoot of the parent group, quarrel or split with first or main group, one person starting the group?
- What was A.A. like in the early days in your area?
- How did you contact new members? How was Twelfth Step work done?
- Did you seek the cooperation of local community and professional agencies – ministers, doctors, law enforcement agencies?
- Who were the founders and group officers of the early groups?
- How often were meetings held, what kind of meeting format was used? (Speakers, open meetings, closed discussion, any public meetings held?)
- Were there any special problems that arose during the early years – growing pains, etc.?
- What was the group's original name – did it change, if so, when? More than one change of name? What is the present name of the group?
- Do you know how the group was first received by the community when it was started?
- Do you think your group or groups has/have had any influence in your community? Has the attitude of local professionals, particularly towards alcoholism, been changed by contact with the local members?
- Conferences or conventions held? When started, how often held, well attended?
- When did clubhouse (if you have one) get started, and under what circumstances? Any problems develop? How solved?
- Was there any opposition to A.A. or Intergroup feuds in your area – would you elaborate?

- Is there an intergroup or central office in your area or community? Do you know when it was started? How? Any problems?
- Do you celebrate anniversaries, individual and group? How?
- Is there Al-Anon in your community? Alateen? Good relations?
- Have you experienced growth in your area? Who approaches A.A. today: more young people, women, minorities? Are all welcome? Any special problems?
- "Outside Agency" in your area? What is your relationship with it? Many referrals, any problems with these?
- Do you participate in state or regional get-togethers: conventions, conferences, forums, etc.?
- How has A.A. changed, if it has, since you first encountered it?

Dale G. Shares from Montana

Over the holidays we held a big Alcoholics Anonymous archives workshop. Tom W., our Area 40 archivist, gave a brief (one hour) oral history of Alcoholics Anonymous. There were many A.A. books and Grapevines being displayed by Kathy C., as well as other items of historical value to A.A. The meeting started with the Serenity Prayer followed by the Twelve Traditions. As Tom W. was speaking of important events in A.A. history ("markings on the journey," if you will), Kathy C. would hold up and display historical items with interest and enthusiasm. Tom and Cathy working together (remember: We can do together what we cannot do alone) made for a really good A.A. workshop. It was awesome, and many a newcomer were overwhelmed by all the information.

The workshop was followed by a potluck monthly A.A. Birthday meeting, several Alcoholics Anonymous movies, and marathon meetings. We made a night of it; what a great time we all had.

Being part of A.A.'s archives is such a blessing for me and the others that help. We all work together.



*The Alcoholics Anonymous Archival Repository
Area 40, Montana*

Group Histories Do We Have Yours?

In 1998 G.S.O.'s Archives received many area and group histories, as well as updates on those we already have in our files. A sizable collection—approximately 120 boxes of original group records—has been forwarded to the Archives from the files department.

This material has been scanned by files for easy access, and now the original documents need to be captured and preserved for permanent storage.

Is your area and/or group represented in our collection? We welcome all contributions.

History of A.A. in South Africa

The following letter was sent to G.S.O. in 1970.

Thank you for your letter, personally written to me, and calling me "dear friend," because that is how I think of all members of A.A., and particularly practicing, honest ones. I don't know if you are Mr., Mrs. or Miss, and I don't know the color of your skin, but the most beautiful part of A.A. is that you have a friend, somebody that wants nothing from you, is interested in you, and wants to help you regardless of anything. To me A.A. is a wonderful way of life, you can call it a religion if you like, but it must be practiced one day at a time and every day, one step at a time and all Twelve Steps, one Tradition at a time and all Traditions. Here in South Africa A.A. has grown from a tiny seed into a well-organized working force today, and I am proud of anything I have done for it and hope to do for it; it saved my life, it put my feet on the ground, it helps me keep my feet on the ground, what more can a man ask of anything on earth?

I am an Angora goat farmer experiencing one of the worst droughts here in history. It seems as if our land is turning into a desert, and what a beautiful land South Africa can be when it rains. I am 59, I have farmed 40 years – Angora



The author's prize-winning Angora Goats

goats, one of the oldest and most renowned studs in the country. I once had five farms; I now have one left with dying, suffering animals on it. My two sons are working in the cities as salesmen to make a living, but I still have A.A. and my friends. That is why I value A.A., something that is solid, the principles of which never change. I have very good health, something A.A. gave me back years ago and has helped me to keep ever since. You, as a practicing member of A.A., don't have to wonder why I love A.A. because that is what it is all about.

Thanks for Sharing...

Hats off to the California Northern Interior Area and to the Houston (Texas) Intergroup, both of which generously responded to the G.S.O. of Ireland's request for old Grapevines.

This is a wonderful example of sharing. Ireland would welcome further donations of Grapevines from the 1940s, '50s or '60s. If you send to G.S.O. Archives we will be happy to forward them to Ireland.

G.S.O. Archives welcomes comments, notes, correspondence, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115