

Construction Project Doubles Archives Storage Space



As the collection at G.S.O. Archives grew, material sometimes had to be stacked in a manner that created a hazardous environment.

The G.S.O. Archives doubled its storage space with the renovation completed at the end of last year. Holdings of the Archives had years ago outgrown the space allotted to them, with boxes of material sitting on the floor and sometimes reaching to the ceiling.

The department does use an off-site facility for material requiring climate and humidity control, such as original early material on the history of the Fellowship. But what was needed was more space for the kinds of materials that the Archives needs to access ever day, such as various printings of all A.A.W.S. publications, which include pamphlets, books, Conference Reports, etc. Also to be stored in the new space



The double-stacked files in the old Archives vault had to be moved to temporary storage locations around the General Service Office to make way for construction.

for daily access will be such files as group records and personal manuscript collections.

A decision was made to renovate at a time when a more general construction project for the General Service Office was underway. The work took about two months, and construction was limited to the vault. The exhibit area of the Archives was unaffected.

“The additional space has made it easier for the Archives staff to organize material,” says Michelle Mirza, (nonalcoholic) Archives director. “The arrangement of space affects the day-to-day administration of the collection materially” says Michelle. “The expansion enables us to house materials by subject and record groups.”

Work creating a new Archives vault, which was scheduled to coincide with a general construction project underway at G.S.O., took about two months to complete. The exhibit area of the Archives was unaffected.

Emptying the old storage space prior to renovation — and finding temporary storage places around the office — was a major effort. When the new space was ready, the next task was to round up all the material and refile it. “I think unpacking the boxes was the most daunting, but working together we did it,” says Michelle.

The new space has been equipped with modified shelving and is expected to provide storage capacity to accommodate up to 10 years’ worth of growth in the collection. Each year the Archives becomes the repository for copies of A.A.W.S. and non-A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets and literature, new Conference Reports, Board minutes, in addition to books and magazine articles on A.A. and alcoholism.

Material can now be grouped by specific sections, such as events and meetings, which include the records of General Service Conferences, World Service Meetings, Regional Forums, and International Conventions.

A secured processing room was also added. “We finally have a dedicated space to perform preservation work, as opposed to the small, cluttered desk space we’ve used for many years,” says Michelle.



The three aisles in the new vault are equipped with modified shelving, and the expanded space is expected to accommodate up to 10 years’ growth in the collection.

With a Collection Policy, an Archives Knows Where It Stands

(Most of the information in this article is taken from the book “Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts” by F. Gerald Ham, part of the Archival Fundamentals Series produced by the Society of American Archivists.)

One of the most important tools for any archival repository is a collection policy. This simple document helps to determine what your archives will and will not collect, and states in general terms how such materials will be sought, acquired, accessioned, disposed of, stored, and even removed from your holdings.

Collection policies are especially important in archives for Alcoholics Anonymous, because of the large number of other A.A. repositories with similar interests. Collection policies can be written alone by the archivist, in conjunction with other archivists, in an archives committee, or with any other individuals with interest in knowledge of archives.

A clear collection policy can help to specify the purpose and goals of your archives and focus your efforts and work. For example, if your collection policy specifies that you will collect personal correspondence from individuals, but not anything related to business activities, you have limited and simplified the amount of work you need to perform and narrowed the scope of your collection.

“We have a lot of stuff — I mean a lot,” says Marbet B., archivist for Area 57, Oklahoma. “We have broken the material into two categories — Oklahoma history and A.A. history — and have decided we need to focus on Oklahoma history.” She says that without a collection policy, “you wind up grabbing at everything that comes along.” In the absence of guiding principles you lose track of your purpose as an archivist, she says. “It becomes about objects rather than information.”

Be Specific

It is critical for a collection policy to be specific. As an A.A. archive, you will likely be seeking items that pertain to the history of the Fellowship within your jurisdiction, including books and other literature, meeting minutes, convention/conference/round-up materials, correspondence, oral histories, group histories and records, newspaper clippings, and other items. A collection policy will detail, as clearly as possible, which of these items you are attempting to acquire, and what falls out of the scope of your collection.

A collection policy can help differentiate your archives from others, and help convince prospective donors why their collections are important or (on the other hand) are unnecessary to your collections. Further, it can help efforts in reappraising or removing materials in your collection, is a constant guide despite changing staff, and forces archivists to consider what they are physically capable of collecting.

This last point is, in many ways, where a collection policy must begin. Practical matters are the first facts one must consider, including the physical space available for collections, the capacity to store and preserve materials, and the financial resources available to complete any planned tasks. This process, by which you examine the characteristics of their repository and then determines where it excels or is deficient, is known as Collection Analysis.

Typically, the first element in a collection policy is the name of the repository, coupled with a general statement of purpose for the archives. This statement can as broad or narrow as you like, but it is important to keep in mind the capabilities of your repository. It seems likely that, for A.A. archivists, the primary objective of your repository will be to attain materials that reveal the history of A.A. within your District, Area, Region, or other location. The second component delineates the specific types of material you will seek to collect. The subjects, types, and formats of the material sought is placed here, including any individuals, events, organizations, time periods, geographic locations, or other topics which are useful to your mission.

You may also specify what will not be collected. For example, if you do not wish to collect A.A. chips, tokens, or other memorabilia or you do not feel it necessary to collect every Big Book sent to you, you can indicate that here.

Detailing the Acquisition Process

The third component is a statement which defines how material will be collected, and may be the most complex section. This section should indicate the degree to which you will pursue materials. You can choose to solicit donors for materials, accept certain donations, gifts, or bequests, or seek transfers from other organizations. It is important to be reasonable when considering acquisition policies, because seeking what you cannot get will simply waste time and energy, and accepting too many items will leave you with a huge processing backlog and a deficit of space.

You could start by considering what your priorities are, based on your previous examinations of your own collection and how well they fulfill your mission. Also, try to discover what is available for you to collect which may be clearly valuable or which may be lost if not collected quickly. Explicitly indicate what materials you will accept and what you will exclude from collecting, and make clear what your guidelines for retaining collected material may be.

It is unlikely that your archives will retain every item acquired in an accession, so plainly state how unwanted material will be disposed of, whether it be returned to its original owner, given to a more appropriate institution, sold or auctioned, or simply disposed of.

Fourth, it is important to indicate how material will be removed when it is no longer appropriate for your repository. This applies to items which no longer fit the mission of your archives or for which you can no longer provide ade-

quate housing. For instance, a collection of papers about an A.A. member that does not make significant mention of their activities in or with A.A. may not be appropriate to maintain. Again, specificity is important, and you can outline all of the legal, logistical, and other steps necessary to removing an item from your collection. List the reasons for which an item may be deaccessioned, as well as the methods by which the item may be removed from your archives. Again, it can be returned to its donor or their heirs, given to another repository, sold or auctioned, or disposed of. Please note that, typically, this section serves only as an example of your deaccession policy, and that a more formal and complete deaccession policy is usually an entirely separate document.

Relationship with Other Archives

Lastly, it is necessary to consider the relationship of your archives to other repositories and organizations. This is especially true for A.A. archives, because although all such archives are unique, they also have highly similar missions and collection priorities. It is very important to cooperate with other repositories, not only because it makes the efforts of all interested parties easier, but also because it is considered unethical in archival practice to unjustly deny another archive its opportunity to collect.

This section will often state that you will direct donors with materials more appropriate in other repositories to those repositories, and that you will help records creators or owners to properly care for their own records. Basically, you should be aware of the acquisition policies and missions of similar or related institutions, and formulate a plan to avoid conflict when seeking materials. If it seems best to defer to another archive for a certain purpose, indicate that intention here. Lastly, indicate if you are interested in loaning materials or accepting loans from other institutions, and try to clarify how such activities will take place.

Ultimately, it is beneficial for an archives to have a collections policy, not only to help the archivists, but to ensure that the collections, materials, and records on which the archive is based are wisely managed.

For a sample collection policy template, please contact the G.S.O. Archives by writing to P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, by calling us at (212) 870-3400, or by sending an E-mail to archives@aa.org.

1) Ham, F. Gerald. *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago; The Society of American Archivists, 1993.

2) "G.S.O. Archives Collection Policy" (<http://www.aa.org/subpage.cfm?page=179>)

3) "The National Archives — Archive Collection Policy Statements: Checklist of Suggested Contents" (http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archive_collection_policy.pdf)

Early Spanish Translations Of A.A. Literature

(This article is based on research by Juan R., an A.A. historian from Hollister, California.)

The wife of a Spanish-speaking A.A. member in Los Angeles in the early 1940s made the first translation of a pamphlet —“A.A.”— into Spanish. (Her husband, Gilberto, started the first A.A. group in Monterey Nuevo Leon, Mexico, though it did not last — and Gilberto did not stay sober.)

A few years later, in March 1946, according to an article in the *Cleveland Bulletin* at the time, a Spanish-speaking A.A. member by the name of Dick P. presented Bill W. with a copy of the Big Book in Spanish. The article identified Dick as the first Spanish-speaking member of the Fellowship and said that he had translated the Big Book with the help of his wife. The work reportedly took three years but, sadly, that translation has disappeared.

Frank M., who was born in Puerto Rico, finished his translation of the Big Book into Spanish in 1947. Referring to Frank in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (published in 1957), Bill W. says: “He worked daytimes as an interpreter for a New York importer and at night he labored over his love, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Today his translation is the foundation cornerstone for A.A. in Spanish-speaking countries.” (page 200)

Copies of the book were sent to Mexico and Puerto Rico and New York, though it was not mass-produced until the early 1950s. Frank’s translation was used in El Salvador, Colombia, the United States, and Mexico. Several editions of the book were eventually printed in these countries.

In Mexico, Carlos C. did a translation of the Big Book in Castilian Spanish.

The General Service Office New York decided on an effort to translate A.A. literature, and by 1961 all the pamphlets and basic A.A. literature was available in Spanish.

The early lack of translated material had an adverse impact on the growth of A.A. in Latin America. There is evidence of A.A. groups being started by non-alcoholic professionals that faded eventually, in part due to the lack of literature. Dick P. tried unsuccessfully to help establish A.A. in Mexico in 1946, giving a talk about A.A. in that country. One

story is that his address was given so much advanced coverage that the beer companies tried to impede the presentation.

There is a great debate regarding where A.A. first took root in Latin America, with Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia named as possibilities. In any case, these are the countries where A.A. grew early on. Carlos A. in Mexico created a publication “Mis Ojas Sueltas” (“My Loose Leaves”). In it were excerpts of the Akron pamphlets translated into Spanish, among other A.A. historical material.

The spirit of perseverance and hope is evident in these early efforts to bring A.A. to the Spanish-speaking world, and well-established in the 21 countries where Spanish is the official language.

By Juan R.

Washington State to Celebrate The 75th Anniversary of A.A.

On June 13, A.A. members in Washington State will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the birth of the Fellowship. Because many members are unable to attend the A.A. International Convention in San Antonio this July, plans were made to offer them an opportunity to celebrate closer to home. Planners expect upwards of 3,500 to attend the event, which will be held at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, WA.

Films of historical interest will be shown, and there will be three panels. The first will be those with over 35 years of sobriety talking about what it was like in their early years. The second panel will be past delegates relating what happened during their terms of office. The third panel will be members from different ethnic and social groups telling what it is like now in A.A.

One of the major presenters will be former G.S.O. general manager Greg M., who will talk about how Alcoholics Anonymous has spread to the far reaches of our world.

Along with this, there will be music and fellowship. The service committees in the area will set up tables with information about A.A. for the families of alcoholics, and other nonmembers. There will be a sobriety countdown, and, oh yes, birthday cake will be served! A good time should be had by all.

David C., Birthday Archives Chair