



MARKINGS

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YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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THE ONLY DEGREE REQUIRED IS A DEGREE OF CARING

These words sum up the experience of participating in the Collections Care Training Program (CCTP), according to Ron R., the archivist for the SouthEastern Pennsylvania Intergroup Association. "This training program allowed participants the opportunity to learn hands-on skills in the care and conservation of the kind of materials found in our A.A. archives. The archives in Philadelphia contains historical material from one of the earliest A.A. groups where the first meeting, on February 28, 1940, was started by Jimmy B., the traveling salesman whose story, "The Vicious Cycle," is recorded in the Big Book.

The CCTP was begun in 1989 by Marilyn W., a professional art conservator, to offer intensive training to people working with historical collections in small museums and organizations in Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley. Her goal was to reach those groups and individuals who might otherwise not have access to the information and tools necessary for the protection and maintenance of their collections.

Even with 155 hours of class time and 40 different lecturers representing areas as diverse from one another as packing and shipping is from techniques in photograph restoration, only a beginner's introduction to this subject is possible. Perhaps the most important lesson taught by the CCTP is knowledge of one's own ignorance. This provides a healthy caution against doing anything radical in terms of preservation and focuses attention on the basics.

The most basic message of this training program comes down to two simple words: "Do something." It is more important to just get started

with the task of caring for your archive collection than it is to do everything perfectly and right away. This is a variation on the theme of progress not perfection. Simply rehousing the material in your archive in a protected environment could be the single most helpful action you can take to preserve and protect those documents. It is better to put an unconserved object into a good environment than it is to take a carefully preserved item and return it to a poor environment. This kind of action involves only a modest amount of cost, but does often require a dedicated group of volunteers willing to carefully place individual documents in acid-free folders or mylar sleeves and then store them in archival quality boxes or metal filing cabinets. Interleaving old photographs with acid-free (but unbuffered) paper keeps one object from damaging another.

"Sticking the words to the object"—is another catch phrase that makes good sense for archivists. Basically this means keep your records attached somehow to the items to which they apply—e.g. by using an index number written in pencil on the object and cross referenced on the data record. Including a copy of the registration information inside the folder that contains the item is also a safe way of guaranteeing that the right information stays with the object it refers to.

Archivists are temporary custodians of the materials entrusted to our care. Our jobs are 90% care and maintenance and 10% preservation. Care of the collections is the primary conservation activity we can undertake.

It is difficult to resist the temptation to aggressively "attack" the deterior-

ating materials in our collections that are suffering from fifty years of natural aging and poor storage. This is a problem similar perhaps to that faced by the enthusiastic newcomer who wishes to tackle the tough "action" Steps (4&5, 8&9), before laying the foundation of sobriety. In the case of A.A. archive materials, the Steps apply as well.

Twelve Steps for A.A. Archivists

Step One: Admitted that we, as archivists, are powerless over the natural cycle of deterioration that all documents will go through—conservation scientists call this "inherent vice," but we know it simply as "all things will break and fall apart."

Step Two: Came to believe and trust that the higher power who brought these precious A.A. materials to our care will restore them to a condition of usefulness. Otherwise we will go crazy trying to do alone what no one archivist unaided can do.

Step Three: Having accepted our powerlessness and having come to believe that we cannot do all this work alone, we made a decision to turn our will and the life of our archives over to the care of g.o.d. (good orderly direction), as we understood it. This involved deciding what the primary purpose of your archives is and whether we are preserving the object or the information from that object—or a combination of the two. For example, most of the newsprint in our collection dating from the early 1940's is severely deteriorated. Conserving it to archival standards would be an expensive and time-consuming process. The most important part of those documents is the information on how the fellowship grew and how it was perceived in the public

eye and so a xerox on acid-free paper of most of those materials will serve our archive's purposes well. However, there are a couple of articles that are of special significance since they represent the very first news coverage of A.A. in this area. Those items we have decided are worth the time and money to de-acidify and encapsulate in mylar.

Step Four: Took an inventory of our collections, making it fearless and thorough. We didn't hide the problems under the rug and listed the archive's (and archivist's) assets as well as liabilities. Without this inventory, future plans for care and conservation will be based on half-measures.

Step Five: Admitted the exact nature of our archive's problems to a higher power, ourselves (very important) and to others on our Archive Committee or to someone involved in A.A. archive work elsewhere. This was the end of our isolation as A.A. historians and opened windows of fresh (filtered) air and light (low level and UV protected) onto our collections. We found that others have been faced with the same problems we are faced with and are willing to share their experience, strength and hope with us. Nothing is so bad in our archives that another person involved in this area of service can't identify

with or offer some solution to help.

Step Six: Became entirely ready to have g.o.d. (as we understood it) remove all the defects of our collections. Remember, this does not mean everything all at once! It just means that we are willing to work on these problems, one item at a time.

Step Seven: Humbly asked for help to do the work that needs to be done. We could not do it alone and without a sense of humility in the face of this kind of work, we found that we might attempt "preservation" steps that we are not qualified to perform and thus irrevocably damage the materials entrusted to our care.

Step Eight: Made a list of all the items that have been harmed by the passage of time and the handling of many people and became willing to mend them the best we could.

Step Nine: Made these "mends" wherever possible, except when "mending" will injure the documents themselves or other materials in contact with the documents. This is a step that requires the utmost in patience and judgment. Too-hasty repairs can cause more damage than simply letting the documents alone. Often materials are attached to each other in such a way that removing one for treatment can harm the other materials to which it is connected.

Step Ten: Continued to take in-

ventory of our archives' collections and our actions as archivists—new materials will be added and new skills will need to be learned, some duplicates or inappropriate items will need to be discarded as well as sloppy or ineffective techniques in our management of the archives. When mistakes are made, we try to admit, accept and patiently correct them.

Step Eleven: Prayer and meditation are as necessary to our work in the archives as they are to our daily sobriety. Without a conscious contact with a power greater than ourselves, we can easily lose our way when faced with the overwhelming challenges of our archives. Only knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out can safely guide us to the care and protection of the precious materials entrusted to our keeping.

Step Twelve: Having had the spiritual awakening necessary to work these steps, which means putting our service activity on a spiritual plane, we then try to enthusiastically carry the message of hope and recovery that is expressed in our archives to other alcoholics and to practice the principles expressed in these steps in all our affairs, both professionally as archivists and personally as sober A.A.'s."

Contributed by Ron R., Archivist, Pennsylvania

Mid-Southern California Archives News

"We held an open house on May 31, 1992 and had a good turnout...We have six panels on our traveling display which can be viewed from both sides making 12 all together. We also bought two extra inserts so that we could have it set up to be pertinent to the particular part of Mid-Southern California Area where we are displaying, i.e. Long Beach/Orange County, etc. From the open house, we recruited some young A.A. members with lots of energy who are all raring to get out and interview more of our oldtimers." Submitted by Goldene L., Mid-Southern California Archives



News from the Belgium Archival Office

"We have rented and moved into a house close to the old General Service Office. Our office has a surface of more or less seventy square meters which provides us with a large storage space. It was high time because our Archives collections accumulated:

—More or less 15 pamphlet

collections

—Sets of A.A. items from all origins

—A collection of all that has been issued with the U.S. copyright up to now from Canada, Belgium and the European French-speaking Council

—A collection of all the A.A. French-Speaking groups, active & inactive

—A collection of all A.A. Conventions

up to now

—Documentation of the National Offices, Documentation over the regional structures, cooperation organizations and allies, all audio-visual material and posters published up to now. What a job since 1989!"

Submitted by Jeffy F., Administrator, Belgium Archives

EXCERPTS FROM "THE ARCHIVES" AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION SEATTLE – Part 4

"I'm Sally W. and I'm an alcoholic. I'm very glad to be here and I want to thank all the people who invited me to speak this morning. It's not one of the things that I get a big kick out of but we know in A.A. we do what we're asked to do. That's how I turned up as an archivist in the first place. I am no longer acting as archivist in Kansas. I was there for 2 years in 1988 - 1990.

Back in about the late 1970's there was a committee formed to see what kind of interest they could get up in getting an archives started in Kansas. In 1980 the then chairman Bob O. wrote a letter about why a Kansas archives should be established. I'll read in part 'There is a need and an obligation to preserve the experience, history, and memorabilia of the Fellowship which has been in existence since 1935. The papers, records and notes of these years need to be collected and preserved in such a way that they can be available for guidance and research by A.A. members. Not only for the present but for generations to come.' Some of the things that we would like to have in our archives do get destroyed. I know this from personal experience in my own group or one of the groups that I have belonged to in the past. Somebody decided to paint the room and they cleaned it up. They took everything out of the cabinets and threw them away. There were notes from the very first meetings started in 1940. It is too bad. There is a quote here in Bob's letter from a letter that they received when they were trying to get the archives started. In part it says, 'I wish I could help you in your

research but all the information I had concerning early A.A. in the state came to me when I became Secretary/Treasurer. I did try to collate it and put it in some kind of order as it was a jumbled mess. As far as the Adam M. papers were concerned, I was told by John D. that his wife destroyed all the tapes and other stuff he had when he died. That's the kind of thing we're trying to stop and make sure it doesn't happen anymore.' When I took over most of the archives were in boxes. The woman who was the archivist ahead of me had been trying to get the group histories together into a book. She had a separate binder for each district and she was trying to get histories from each of the groups to put in those books. So I had those to start with and I continued to work with that. Shortly after coming in I heard from Earl in Oklahoma and he wanted to know if I needed any Grapevines. I sent him a list of what we already had. He sent me a batch of what we didn't have and that was a big help in filling in. That's the kind of thing that goes on in the archives I think. Everybody shares and that's what is so wonderful. He just shares everything he gets and it's just wonderful. We are neighbors and a lot of the things that happened down there happened also in Kansas.

Even when I came in 17 years ago, one night a week, I believe it was the Monday night meeting, there would be two or three salesmen and of course this is how A.A. got into our part of the country anyway. The funny thing the most of them seem to be meat salesmen. I don't know why

meat but that's what it seemed like to me!! They went to small towns and this was what had to be done in these little bitty places. One other thing, I brought some of these, it's a proven and highly successful method of sobering and defogging alcoholics for use by A.A. groups. This was put out by Dr. Nasan N. from Kansas City who started in A.A. in helping other alkies in 1941. As I understand it he had just about lost everything including his license to practice medicine at the time that he came into the program. He must have been an extremely interesting person. I brought some of these. This is marvelous the number of people that are here. I was told sometime back that at other Internationals the archives group is very small so I didn't bring enough. I would be glad to stick around or talk to you outside afterwards and if you would like a copy of this I would be glad to have some more run off. It's fun and evidently it worked—that's the amazing part and nobody uses it anymore. There is a poem that I got when I was in England that I love. It's by Carl Sandberg and says, 'Whenever a society or civilization perishes there is always one condition present, they forgot where they came from.' Obviously you people haven't forgotten where you came from and I think this is marvelous. Thank You!!

"My name is Bob and I'm an alcoholic. I've been sober 4 days, 1 week, 9 months and 7 years and it's no mistake that I'm here today. I truly feel that I'm keeping right now an appointment made for me by God. God gave me a talent and that talent

EXCERPTS cont.

is art. He also gave me another talent and that's people. He gave me a third talent and that was a hell of a thing and that was to drink real well and real long. That's what got me here today. I have so much that's running through my mind it's unbelievable. Archives to me is the most important thing that we could do today. If we lose it, if one early-timer expires as has happened in Arkansas and that head knowledge is gone than that's true knowledge that is wasted. We have a little bit of time so I would like to go back over probably the most important thing that we're doing or in the process of doing as far as the state of Arkansas is concerned. There was a recent meeting in Vienna and it was in the great hall of the Austrian National Library. The meeting in Vienna was a conference. It was attended by 47 different countries. It was also attended by 109 different nationalities. They determined at this Vienna conference that the intellectual record of the past 150 years was in danger of disappearing. 25% of the contents was in brittle condition. Ladies and gentlemen our archives are like that right now. I don't want to seem alarming or, critical but it is a fact. I can only tell you what my archives is like. There are different conditions for archives material, running all the way to brittle to nothing but ashes and this is what we're looking at right now. Some people think

that the records of the past are of interest only to the historian. This is not true; these records can most surely serve as a catalyst for future potential and that is so important. They can prevent us from repeating errors of the past. So you see, this is just another great fantastic way of carrying on the message of A.A. Nothing is so sad as a book or a document that has died. I'm here to tell you in our archives I'm working on a scrapbook right now. It dates way back to the early days. (By the way, the history A.A. in Arkansas dates back to March of 1940. If I want to narrow it down I think it's March 5, 1940.) I have a scrapbook from way back then. I'm literally having to restore and repair that scrapbook and this is what it's all about. I like the little quote Sally used 'Why establish an archives' there is a need and an obligation to preserve this experience in history. The most important thing that you've read is the existing correspondence, records, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles must be collected and preserved and available for guidance and use for generations to come. Collecting is a beautiful thing but please don't let any of this stuff die. How do we go about it? There are various ways. One of our membership through an anonymous donation allowed me the privilege of going to the Modern Archive Institute in Washington, D.C. If you have the capability and the finances or if you don't—go anyway. Go to D.C. and go

to the Institute and complete it. It's a two week crash course. It's the most comprehensive collection of material of what to do and how to go about it and in particular, what not to do as far as archives are concerned. It talks about record centers, record management, as well as about managers and archivist themselves. It talks about record appraisal. What do we have? What do we need? Why do we need it? What is the condition of materials coming in? Is it actually in need of preservation? Are we going to damage the original value of that document by restoring it in some manner? Does it really need restoration or can we merely preserve and carry it on? Arkansas is area 4. It started by 3 cardboard boxes full of material (one of them by the way was a whiskey box). It started by photos, one or two Big Books, a few old letters and a pamphlet called 'Arkansas A.A.' It was a few Grapevines and a grumpy little old lady about this tall called Annie K. I'm not being derogatory in anyway because Annie K. kept the spark until we've got what we have today and that's a viable archives. One that is functioning and has a plan of action. Like Earl says one that has 'credibility.' Annie K. kept that spark alive. She grumped her way on up to area assembly. She jumped up to the podium. She would have to lower the microphone much lower than this and she would tell us 'My God I want these articles. I want this and I want that.'

Progress of the Northern Minnesota Area Archives

"This is to bring you up to date on our progress. We gladly share with you a photo of one of our Archives displays. Our display can be on a one to 20 table set-up. All are used throughout the year 12 to 15 times. The display contains actual and facsimile A.A. archival materials. We estimate a couple of thousand people experience the display annually. On occasion, we give tours of the display. The host is responsible for expenses incurred in travel and on site."

Submitted by Scott J., Archivist, N. Minnesota Archives

