

MARKINGS

YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

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Archivists and Collectors

The following comes from a talk given at the recent Archives Workshop in Akron.

Most of us have books at home that we have picked up and cherished. Does that make us an archivist or collector? A little of both, I think. Although there are many differences between archivists and collectors, they both share the same problems with their respective collections. If these collections and archives contain paper or photographic products, then conservation practices need to be implemented. Collectors tend to overlook these important techniques. Their collections, just the same as our archives, suffer from the ravages of time and environmental damage.



The Western Washington Area Archives Repository

We have a duty to preserve and protect the same papers and books that A.A. collectors strive to obtain for their collections. Admittedly, as A.A. archivists we deal with much more mundane pieces of paper. For example, we have area and district minutes, and records of the day-to-day workings of our Fellowship. We collect letters for posterity and to show our beginnings and the changes of our Fellowship throughout the years. We preserve flyers and banners of events in our hometowns and states. We keep photographs of functions and people who have made our history. We strive to obtain and collate, sort and file, preserve and conserve all these things and many more within the scope of being an archivist of Alcoholics Anonymous. A good friend of mine who was our Seattle Intergroup office manager once told me when I was a district archivist, "Enjoy what you do today, for you are a collector. When you move up to the area level you will become a caretaker." I find that to be mostly true today, for I am the chief historian and caretaker of our

area archives, a job I have loved from the first moment I assumed this position. I still find time to pursue the odd piece here and there and add to our collection. That fire still burns within me, and always will. But my main endeavor today is the upkeep and preservation of our history. As a historian I am asked almost daily for information on Alcoholics Anonymous. I am grateful to my predecessors on our Archives Committee for setting up our repository, for without this resource the job of historian would be far more difficult than it is today.

Within the Western Washington Area Archives Repository we have approximately 50,000 pieces of paper related to A.A. I have spent the last year trying to set up a computer program for retrieval of this material. It is a slow process that will have to be finished by my successor. We also have many books and objects of memorabilia housed within the repository. Some people ask, "Why a repository, couldn't you just keep it in your home?" For starters, it would take about 750 square feet to house all the materials we have. We went about setting up a repository for our archives, and today it is a secure, controlled facility for the storage and research of A.A. materials.

I can only hope that collectors take care to put their collections in a controlled environment. Too often damage occurs when misuse and bad storage conditions prevail. There are only so many A.A. books in print, and the older ones are



Some of the Repository's 50,000 pieces of paper.



Storage facility of the Western Washington Area Archives Repository

deteriorating every day. Pains must be taken to conserve these wonderful resources.

Documents and books need to be protected from anything that will degrade paper fibers. Moisture, heat, ultraviolet light, acidity and handling all cause damage to paper. Water releases paper binder and promotes mildew and rot. Chemical reactions that cause degradation of paper speed up with increased heat, so protection is imperative. UV is strongest in sunlight and florescent light, and will cause premature aging in paper. Handling paper transfers moisture, acids and salts to any document or book. Most modern paper is made by an acid pulping process, and carbon dioxide in the air adds acidity. These acids cause paper to turn brown and brittle, so procedures to reduce all these factors of paper degradation need to begin before permanent damage occurs.

This process of acid deterioration has been going on since the late 1930s, when A.A. material started to be produced. When you look at older material and see yellowing and browning of the paper, this is the damage that acidifying causes. In the end, the paper becomes brittle and irreversible damage has occurred. It is the job of archivists to begin conservation techniques. Collectors also need to have their collections assessed to see if conservation needs to be done.

Understanding the factors that lead to the deterioration of paper and photographic materials allows us to start conservation at the earliest opportunity. We need both archivists and collectors to understand the material they are working with, and to protect them from environmental damage. Try to stabilize deterioration and repair the damage, if possible, as needed. But we must always remember – *Never do anything that cannot be undone.* By implementing conservation techniques, we can begin to preserve our history for future members of our Fellowship. All A.A. archivists and collectors should learn how to protect their valuable collections. Just as there are many differences between archivists and collectors, many positive results can be achieved by the cooperation of these two groups. Each can offer Alcoholics Anonymous many skills and talents which will benefit the Fellowship.

*David C.,
Area 72 archivist, Western Washington*

Fifty Years Ago: A.A. in Japan

Hank G. in Tokyo wrote the following letter to the New York office in early 1948.

HELP! HELP! As a result of the enclosed articles Arthur W., a member of the AA group in Indianapolis for three and one-half years, and a fine wholehearted AA in every sense of the word, and myself, are starting a group in Tokyo.

Next Monday night and Tuesday night we have been ASKED or requested to talk to a group of enlisted men and officers at the Haneda airfield on AA. We hope this will be the nucleus of AA in Tokyo.

Hanson Hathaway, managing editor of the *Stars and Stripes*, is an old friend from Washington. He formerly worked on the *Washington Times* and while not an alcoholic has always been interested in AA and covered several of our annual dinners in Washington. He's a real friend of AA and says we can get anything we want in the paper. Also John Rich and Bill Costello, radio commentators for the Far East area, have promised their cooperation so we are well set so far as publicity is concerned. However, after getting the group started [Arthur W.] and myself will remain anonymous so far as publicity is concerned. So much for that.

You are allowed to send eight ounces air mail. I thought you might send us several envelopes of stuff that way and some other stuff FIRST CLASS MAIL, where you are allowed to send as high as 70 pounds. But we do need some stuff to start off with. All I have is one AA pamphlet and one copy of Jack Alexander's story and one volume of the book. If you have some good talks available would like those first – air mail.

The thing has the blessing of high army officials and army doctors. It has great possibilities. The situation here is somewhat unusual due to many factors, the most important of which ALL civilians and officers are allowed a regular monthly ration of 15 – count'em – 15 bottles of assorted whiskey, including Grand Dad, Old Crow, Canadian Club, etc. for only – hold your breath – \$20.00. Whew! When I think of this I am sure that by now (three months) I would have easily developed into the village or Tokyo Idiot, if it weren't for AA. The same goes for Arthur. BOY, ARE WE GLAD AND THANKFUL FOR AA.

We have a chance to do a good job, I think. With your help we can make it. Altho' we expect to be here only about three or four months we hope to start the ball rolling and leave it in good hands when we leave here.

Put those early timers to work!

Pass It On! Compile

your group's history!

Herb B. Shares from New Ulm, Minnesota

Throughout these past two years, the Archives Committee has met here in New Ulm, where the archives facility is located in my home group building. Meeting here gives members of our committee a hands-on experience of the materials in our files and cabinets. Plans are made here to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic and to our Fellowship. Dates are set to get the traveling display to roundups, district group and area events. Updates are given of recording oldtimers, collections received from the Fellowship, and reports given of progress made or help needed in the districts. Filing papers, Grapevines, newsletters, flyers, paraphernalia and books helps a great deal in trying to keep some kind of order within the facility. This is an ongoing process. In the four years the storage facility has been in operation, much information has gone out to our Fellowship in the form of past area actions, workshops and the lending library of A.A. history.

The end of 1998 is rotation time for all area trusted servants and most districts. A new Archives Committee will form in 1999 with new faces and new recovered alcoholics to take advantage of the collected past in the facility. They in turn, can be informed to better carry the message.

The year 2000 will see the International Convention here in Minneapolis. Already enthusiasm is mounting, even if the thought of meeting thousands of new friends worldwide seems a little overwhelming right now! We want to meet many of you who read *Markings*.

The Chicago Group in 1944

Rick N., Northern Illinois Area archivist, provided G.S.O. with the following local history.

A.A. began its group existence in Chicago in September 1939, when one woman and three men who had made trips to the Akron group met together at the home of one of the men, who had then been practicing the program for more than a year. Although the first gathering was in suburban Evanston, where the senior dry lived, they thought of themselves as the Chicago group. They determined to meet weekly, no matter how few attended, and this schedule has been followed and the influence of A.A. has spread throughout the metropolitan area, from Gary, Indiana on the south, to the Wisconsin line, and west into the suburbs as far as forty miles from the Loop. Evanston now has two neighborhood groups, but they are now only two units among thirty-five that make up the approximately 800 members in what is termed the Chicago group.

The first six meetings were held in Evanston, and at that time four other members came in as a result of the article in *Liberty* magazine, which was the first national publicity given the A.A. movement. The group decided then that it could not fulfill its responsibility unless it made the program available to all of Chicago and a meeting place was obtained in a Loop building, where a lounge was provided in consideration for the members' patronizing the dining room. This was adequate for some eighteen months. After several moves, the group is now meeting in a spacious auditorium on the second floor of the Engineering Building at 209 W. Wacker Drive. Meetings begin at 8:15, but most of those attending come for dinner in a restaurant in the building.

While the metropolitan area contains community groups, which meet separately and carry on their own Twelfth-Step activities, the central assembly maintains its distinction as the Chicago group. All members regard themselves as members of the Chicago group first and of their community units second.

In all this branching out the development has been a natural expansion devised to meet needs as they have arisen. There has been no suggestion of organization for its own sake.

At first, the meetings, which eventually brought on the formation of neighborhood groups, were intended to benefit newcomers by inviting them to meet with older members for informal discussion. The idea proved valuable at once and soon Thursday night meetings were scheduled regularly in various parts of the city and the suburbs. Later on, it was decided after discussion in the citywide body to allot each member group a territorial division and to recognize these units as the place for the discussion of A.A.'s practical affairs. Each small unit was asked to designate a representative to sit on a central "set-up" committee, which meets Tuesday nights before the main meeting. Delegates may bring in proposals from their groups and they carry back to these units whatever of general concern is dealt with at the set-up committee. This simple machinery provides a close, quick contact with the central group available to every member and also eliminates discussion of any business affairs from the main meeting.

The Chicago group has established a club on a modest scale. It is room 607 at 189 W. Madison Street and is open from noon every day through the evening. There are group discussion meetings at 1:00 p.m. Wednesday, and 8:30 p.m. Friday and an open house every Tuesday night after the central group meeting. The club is also open to all A.A.s, but it is intended particularly to provide a wholesome leisure time place for the newcomer.

From the beginning the Chicago group has made social life an important activity. A Sunday evening open house was established in Evanston before the move was made downtown. For some time, members traveled to the suburb weekly from all parts of the city. Then the far Southsiders, and later those on the West Side, started their own Saturday night parties. There are now five open houses on Saturday night.

Won't you share your group's history with us? Each group history we receive is added to that group's file.

The four who attended the first meeting brought to it a deep impression, gained in Akron, of the fundamental simplicity underlying the A.A. program, and the leadership that has developed has remained closely devoted to the idea that the whole of the program lies in the Twelve Steps. There has been constant agreement in the belief that humility and honesty are first essentials and that these may be overlooked if the principal effort of the group is directed toward complex organization or arbitrary rules of conduct.

It was in November 1939, at the time of Marty Mann's visit from New York, that we had our first downtown meeting in the Medical and Central Arts Building. This was on Friday night. The next week the meeting was on Tuesday, and since that time there has always been a downtown meeting every week.

In 1940, when the group had grown to over a hundred people, some of the far-sighted members recognized the importance of small discussion groups. This was tried out by a few members and was most successful. We are often asked how the original boundaries of groups were established. I well remember one Sunday that Earl T. and I spent dotting a map of Chicago – a dot wherever there was a member of the group. Then a couple of the statisticians in the group divided the city into ten parts, allocating not more than twelve people to each section, taking into consideration transportation problems, etc. We now have 26 of these neighborhood groups.

Prior to the appearance of the *Saturday Evening Post* article of March 1, 1941, three of the men in the group borrowed the money to order 100 books – which was a fortunate thing for us, because as a result of this publicity the stock of books in New York was exhausted. After this article the growth of the group was more rapid. On October 1, 1941, the A.A. office was opened downtown next door to the old clubhouse. In April 1942 we moved to the Republic Building and the old clubroom was closed. Steady growth of the groups necessitated more space, and in June 1943 we moved to our present quarters. A lot of national publicity, as well as local publicity, and the fact that last year we were listed in the telephone book, brought such an increase in phone and personal calls that it was decided I needed help in the office.

Grace C., Chicago

The History of A.A. in Indiana

The following appeared in the Northern Indiana Archival Bulletin, 1/1 (1998).

A.A. first came into Indiana through Evansville, of that I am reasonably certain, due to correspondence with one John H., who now resides in Akron, Ohio, where he made his original contact as the eighth man in the organization, in October 1936, some seventeen months after the founding steps in that same city. Mrs. H.'s parents were Evansville residents and

on the occasion of a visit there in May 1938, the couple decided to stay. His search for alcoholics who might be helped was not especially rewarding for some time, although he did make several contacts. There may have been some informal gatherings previously, but Mr. H. has advised that what he terms the first established A.A. meeting was held in his little four-room house, 420 South Denby Street, in April or May of 1940.

Meanwhile, in Indianapolis that same spring, a man who had been sober on his own for almost three years read the *Liberty* magazine article on A.A. and sent to New York for what information was available, but experienced little reaction from what he received. This man was the late, beloved Doherty S. Later in the same year, Irvin M. of the Cleveland group visited Mr. S. and took him and a Mr. B. to Evansville to meet Mr. H. Hope was revived in Doherty's breast, he once told me, so that when he returned to Indianapolis, he soon interested another sufferer in the program on or about October 28, 1940, the date now marked as the founding of the movement in the capital city.

In November of 1943, four Indiana groups were listed by New York: Evansville, Indianapolis, Ft. Wayne and South Bend. The late C. L. B. of Ft. Wayne told me two years ago that his wife read the 1941 Alexander article in the *Saturday Evening Post* and ordered the Big Book, which he refused to read until he had been practically forced to enter the Keeley Institute, taking the book with him. Returning home, he tried to interest others, without much success. On December 7, 1941, the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Mr. B. and three other Ft. Wayne problem drinkers attended the Indianapolis breakfast, and soon afterward started a similar gathering in the Allen County seat. Pearl Harbor was only incidental, of course, but out of Ft. Wayne came the beginning of many other groups in northeastern Indiana and northwestern Ohio.

The first South Bend meeting was held in the C. apartment in August 1943. Some Chicagoans later lent support and A.A. was soon moving in north-central and northwestern Indiana. The Elkhart group had its inspiration in South Bend meetings, Goshen organized under Elkhart sponsorship and I understand a Lagrange man has a home town group function or about to do so.

Old Grapevines Wanted

The G.S.O. of Ireland is looking for pre-1974 issues of the Grapevine. Here are the issues they presently have: 11/48; 3/49; 8/49; 11/51; 8/53; 1/56; 2/60; 10/60; 2/61; 6/61; 11/62; 1/63; 4/63; 1/64; 5/64; 7/64; 7/66; 2/67; 8/68; 3/69; 3/71; 11/71; 4/72; 6/72; 7/72; 8/72; 11/72; 6/73; 11/73; 12/73; 5/74; 6/74; 8/74; 9/74.

Any and all donations would be welcomed, and can be sent to: G.S.O. Archives, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, and we will forward them to Dublin.