Early in 1947, an attractive 29-year-old job seeker named Nell Wing visited a one-woman employment agency in New York, in the hope of finding a temporary position. Honorably discharged from World War II service in the SPARS (the female arm of the U.S. Coast Guard), Nell planned to use her G.I. Bill entitlement to study sculpture under a noted teacher in Mexico. But she needed a short-term job to raise cash for the trip.

The agency woman regretfully told her that the only opening she had was at the Alcoholics Anonymous General Service Office (G.S.O.), though she seemed to doubt that Nell would want to work there. She even whispered the information, as if discussing something not quite respectable for a college graduate with an excellent work and military record.

But Nell had read about A.A. years earlier, and had a good opinion of it. She rushed right over to the office, then at 415 Lexington Avenue in New York, and was immediately hired as a receptionist at $32 a week.

The job was temporary—she stayed at G.S.O. only 36 years! And she never got to study in Mexico, though she continued to pursue art as an avocation.

Nell was a nonalcoholic, but something about A.A. drew her to the Fellowship as a lifelong career. For one thing, she had seen the raw face of alcoholism while growing up in Kendall, N.Y., a small town in the western part of the state. Her father was a justice of the peace, and she could remember police officers banging on the door at 3 a.m. to have drunks booked for arrest. She had always thought of alcoholics as troubled people needing help.

Nell had first learned about A.A. as a student at Keuka College in the New York finger lakes area. She remembered reading the Morris Markey article about A.A. published in Liberty magazine in 1939 and also the famous Jack Alexander article from The Saturday Evening Post in 1941. A.A. was also getting considerable additional publicity by 1947.

Though she had planned to study in Mexico, she loved New York City and wanted to live there. She was a New Yorker for most of the next sixty years, except for a brief stay in a New Jersey nursing home before she passed away at age 89 in 2007.

Nell was perfectly suited for the positions she would hold at G.S.O. She would later say that “from the beginning, I was caught by the A.A. Fellowship, particularly by the caring. It was not so much a general ‘caring for our fellowman,’ but a one-on-one caring, a love for one another without thought of any reward.”

She would remember her G.S.O. starting day, March 3, 1947, as cold and blustery. The office then had only 13 employees, including two A.A. staff members. Even then, Bill W. did not work at G.S.O. every day, but came down once a week from his home near Bedford Hills in Westchester County. A.A. then had about 1,250 groups and 40,000 members, but it was growing rapidly and would double its membership in the next few years.

On her second day at G.S.O., Nell met Bill, whom she would describe many years later as her “close friend and confidant, the big brother/father figure of her middle life.” In the beginning, however, Bill simply acknowledged her as a new employee and delivered a rambling monologue about plans for A.A.’s future and what they hoped to accomplish at G.S.O.

Nell started out as a receptionist and also handled many of the clerical and secretarial duties in the office. She later shared a large office with Bill and became his personal secretary, although also serving as secretary to the A.A. World Services, Inc. Board. Later she became the first archivist for A.A. and served in that capacity until her retirement in 1982.

The staff of the G.S.O. Archives wants to wish everyone the best for the holiday season. Your devotion to preserving A.A. history is crucial for maintaining the vital story of our Fellowship. We thank you for your generous service, and we wish you Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!
Nell, a pretty woman who surely had a number of would-be suitors, never married, though she was in love with an A.A. member who died before they could marry. But it’s safe to say that A.A. became her extended family, while Bill and Lois W. became her surrogate parents. In fact, she and Lois became so close following Bill’s death that she spent every other weekend at Stepping Stones, the home Bill and Lois had acquired in 1941.

Those who knew Nell remember a person who seemed to be consistently cheerful and friendly, a person who truly did fit the expression, “Not a mean bone in her body.” Over the years, she developed a collection of A.A. friends throughout the world and also kept track of them. When some of them passed away, she would mourn them in notes and conversations with friends. In her memoirs, (Grateful to Have Been There, Hazelden) she talked about legendary members including Captain Jack, skipper of oil tankers, who spearheaded A.A.’s internationalist movement. One writer, somewhat unkindly, described her as a giggle, tender-hearted chatterbox. She did love to talk and giggled a bit, but the best part of that description was her tender heart. Unfortunately, “chatterbox” falls short of describing a remarkable woman who was highly intelligent, well-educated, and deeply concerned about A.A. and its membership.

As the years passed, Nell’s experience and knowledge gave A.A. another advantage. As a nonalcoholic with no anonymity to protect, Nell could represent A.A. on television or in public meetings. She was very good as a TV spokesperson. She could, in effect, speak somewhat like an A.A. member simply because she was so immersed in the Fellowship that she knew how members might express themselves about certain issues. She appeared on the Dick Cavett show and on other programs, giving her full name as Nell Wing and being identified as an employee of the A.A. General Service Office.

It’s also safe to say that Nell was truly the close friend Bill W. needed, as well as a personal secretary and confidante. As the years passed at G.S.O., she came to know Bill better than almost anybody on the staff. She typed his letters and the handwritten articles he composed in his Stepping Stones hideaway, Wit’s End, a small building he and a friend had constructed in the woods behind the main house. She developed a keen understanding of his moods and the deep depressions that overtook him at times. And she would receive the letters and calls from A.A. members who chose to criticize Bill when they should have been expressing gratitude for his role in their sobriety. Nell shared Bill’s pain from these gratuitous attacks and knew how he always stepped back from responding in kind.

Did You Know…?

That Archibald Roosevelt, son of President Theodore Roosevelt, served on the General Service Board as a nonalcoholic trustee from April 1953 until April 1970. From 1955 until 1967 he was treasurer of the board. He also served on the committees for Retirement and the 20th Anniversary Convention, and was chairman of the trustees’ Finance Committee. In his letter of resignation he wrote, “I wish you to know that what A.A. has done for me is far more than I could ever do for A.A.”

Nell also realized that many A.A. members did not completely appreciate all the contributions Bill had made to A.A.’s continuing success and growth. While Bill himself never sought to receive credit for these contributions, Nell documented them for the Archives and future generations of A.A. members.

Following her retirement in 1982, she continued to stay in touch with friends at the General Service Office while maintaining her apartment in Manhattan. Her retirement years were happy and serene. In her memoirs, she would write: “As I have moved into my seventies, my life is rich and joyful, thanks to A.A. I have countless friends throughout the world with whom I am in touch regularly and who express their love and support for me, which I return in full measure. I have been invited to share at meetings where I’m given more credit than I deserve. Because I, too, try to practice the Steps, I have been and am able to cope with unforeseen realities such as cancer, or the death of dear friends, as well as occasional personal conflicts, with some degree of courage, forthrightness, and honesty—instead of running away or avoiding them as I used to.”

When Nell could no longer live alone she moved to a lovely assisted living facility in New Jersey. Though her memory began to fail, she was always bright and friendly when friends dropped in to visit her. Her guardian was Bill Wing, a loving nephew who had visited her family home many times while growing up in the Rochester, New York, area. A happy woman to the last, she passed away on February 14, 2007. Perhaps it was beautifully symbolic that a person with so much love would make her departure on St. Valentine’s Day.

Mel B., Toledo, Ohio

The Passing of a Friend: Dennis Manders, In Memoriam

Dennis Manders died on July 5, 2012, in Asheville, North Carolina at the age of 87. Dennis served the A.A. Fellowship as a longtime employee of the General Service Office, starting out in 1950 as a bookkeeper and ultimately becoming G.S.O.’s chief financial officer. A nonalcoholic who was just barely aware of the fledgling Fellowship when he came to work for A.A., Dennis met Bill W. in his first weeks at G.S.O. and subsequently worked side-by-side with him over the course of many years.

“Dennis was kind and caring, but principled and serious at the same time,” says Don Meurer, today’s nonalcoholic chief financial officer at G.S.O., and one who has long considered Dennis a mentor and friend. “While he could give you a hug and counsel you on things, he would also want things done correctly and honestly. I still marvel at some of the files I have and the way he would keep detailed records,” adds Don. “And he did it by hand, without a computer.”

“Dennis understood the alcoholic personality,” Don added, “and it helped him keep his work mission focused.”

Reflecting on his first meeting with Bill W. Dennis recounted, “He asked me, ‘Do you drink, Denny?’ And being an honest guy, I said well, yeah, I like a beer once in a while. And he laughed. He thought it was the funniest thing in the world. ‘I’m so happy that you drink,’ he said. ‘We wouldn’t want to hire a teetotaler we’d be afraid was looking down his nose at us drunks.’”

Reminiscing about G.S.O. in the early days, Dennis said, “I think what kept us together as a pretty strong group, was be-
cause it just wasn’t a regular job where you got paid to do something, then you went home at night, and that was it. There was real meaningful reason behind the job. I think we were in the business of saving lives. And the more you got exposed to that, the more you got into it. Somewhere along the line you’d be asked why did they have such longevity of employees, and that is one of the reasons. I think if you stayed six months when you got hired, you pretty much got hooked there for life.”

More importantly, perhaps, to A.A. members, Dennis was a vital link to Bill W. and to A.A.’s early days. Along with Nell Wing, Bill’s longtime secretary, who passed away in 2007, these two nonalcoholics provided prodigies of service and proved to be willing participants in A.A.’s growth and reliable witnesses to the extraordinary evolution of the Fellowship.

Dennis retired from G.S.O. in 1986, after more than 35 years of service. It is with sadness that A.A.s around the world recognize his death; yet it is with great gratitude, as well, for having known such a kind, compassionate and loyal friend.

The Archives recently received transcriptions of Dennis’ recollections and his personal copy of a 16th printing of the second edition Big Book.

### Poverello Medal

On December 7, 1949, the first Poverello Medal was presented to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous by the College of Steubenville in Ohio. (Now called Franciscan University of Steubenville.) The highest nonacademic honor the University can bestow, it commemorates organizations and individuals who, through great strength of character and the practice of Christian charity, have imitated St. Francis in their love and service to the poor.

The medal was presented to Sister Ignatia, who was asked by Bill W. to accept it on behalf of the Fellowship. The acceptance was made by “Mr. X,” an anonymous member of the organization. The original medal and certificate reside at the Cleveland Catholic Diocese Archives in Richfield, Ohio. This award precedes the prestigious Lasker Award that A.A. received from the American Medical Association (A.M.A.) in 1951 at the San Francisco Opera House.

Over the years, the Akron A.A. Archives has acquired two of the certificates. This past August, Teresa, Seattle’s A.A. Archivist, phoned the Akron Archives to ask the significance of the certificate, as they too had a copy. This raised the question, “How many copies were distributed? How many are still in existence?” Telephoning the office of the University we were informed that their archives discovered a request to send a certificate to every chapter of A.A. Details surrounding the origin of this request are no longer in existence.

After speaking with Michelle Mirza (nonalcoholic), G.S.O. archivist, we were encouraged to explore the history of this by bringing it to light in Markings. Hopefully, if there are other certificates in existence their significance will not be lost or discarded.

We are also curious about the mysterious “Mr. X.” Dr. Bob would still have been alive at this time and with so little information recorded we may never know the identity of the anonymous “Mr. X.” It does give us a window into the development of the humility of our collective Fellowship in the early years as our status as a new society of sober alcoholics begins to emerge and be recognized and acknowledged for its contribution to humanity.

Jim B., Gail L. and the Archives Committee of Akron

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Note from G.S.O. Archives: We have some interesting pieces of information on this award. It was presented to A.A. at the College of Steubenville’s first Founders’ Day dinner, part of a celebration of the college’s founding held at the Fort Steuben hotel. This public award was the first given to the A.A. Fellowship, and set the precedent of giving awards to A.A. rather than its founders. Sister Ignatia was hesitant to receive the award, but was convinced by her religious superiors to accept it. According to a newspaper article, the whereabouts of only five out of the 2,500 copies of the certificate are known. Recently, the G.S.O. Archives was given a copy of the certificate by the Akron A.A. Archives.

### A.A. Archives Workshop

The 16th National Alcoholics Anonymous Archives Workshop was held in Cocoa Beach, Florida, October 4-7, 2012, where all previous attendance records were shattered. There were 259 attendees. With the theme “Passing It On” this event brought together Archivists from across the United States and Canada. Most attendees had a long history in general service and a strong interest in keeping A.A. history alive.

Thursday evening Dave W., chair of the event, (Area 14, North Florida), opened the Workshop. North Florida Archivist Steven R.; Jim B. Archives Service Coordinator; Jimmy the Hat, South Florida Archives chair; and Karla K., alternate Archives chair, presented various aspects of the history of A.A. in Florida. Among the interesting information: Bill W. helped Tom S., an early trustee from Florida, who established the North Florida Archives chair; and Karla K., alternate Archives chair, presented various aspects of the history of A.A. in Florida. Among the interesting information: Bill W. helped Tom S., an early trustee from Florida, who established the North Florida Area Archives in 1950.

Friday afternoon a history of Young People in Florida A.A. was presented by Chad H. Also, day-long workshops offered hands-on programs on conservation and preservation.

Friday evening, Michelle Mirza (nonalcoholic), G.S.O.’s Archivist, presented on G.S.O.’s Archives. She spoke of the Archives’ preservation efforts, showing photos of the co-founders, their wives, and other early A.A. members. She played an audio of Bill at the 1960 General Service Conference speaking...
on the significance of preserving A.A. history. Michelle also read excerpts from some of Bill’s letters.

The new documentary, “Bill W.,” produced by Page124 Productions, was screened by one of the directors/producers of the film, Kevin Hanlon. Being a nonalcoholic he found the research for this work fascinating, plus it produced new pictures and information not previously known about Bill’s early life.

Dave W., Archivist from Daytona Beach, gave a presentation on the book Twenty-Four Hours a Day. He explained that it was written by Richmond W., an A.A. who spent winters in Daytona Beach. Dave spoke about the history of the book and Richmond’s contributions to A.A. in Florida.

We were fortunate to have general service trustee Nancy H., chair of the trustees’ Archives Committee, as our Saturday night speaker. She stressed the importance of documenting and gathering A.A. information and history and thanked everyone involved in this form of service.

The 17th National Alcoholics Anonymous Archives Workshop will be held in Springfield, Illinois, September 26-29, 2013. The 18th National Alcoholics Anonymous Archives Workshop was selected for Philadelphia, PA.

NAAAW Committee

G.S.O.’s Archives Celebrates 37 Years

On November 5, 1975, A.A.’s Archives was officially opened with a ceremony chaired by George G., then chairman of the trustees’ Archives Committee. Lois W., Bill’s widow, cut the ribbon and Nell Wing was, the Archivist. For the past few years, the Archives staff has observed the opening with special displays, tours and, of course, cake. This year’s celebration coincided with the visit of the 22nd World Service Meeting delegates, which made the occasion even more special. It was like a mini-International Convention in the Archives.