



Nell at the offices of the G.S.O. in 1966, where her initiative saved much early A.A. material from the dustbin.

Nell Wing, A.A.'s First Archivist, Dies at 89

Nell Wing (nonalcoholic), A.A.'s first archivist and friend to legions of A.A.s around the world, died February 14. She was 89 years old.

In 1947, recently discharged from the U.S. Coast Guard (she served in the female arm called SPARS), Nell was on her way to Mexico to study art. Seeking a temporary job, she landed one at A.A.'s headquarters on Lexington Ave.—35 years later, in 1982, she retired.

Nell, who was 29 at the time she started at G.S.O. (then called the Alcoholic Foundation), served as receptionist and did other clerical work before becoming Bill's secretary in 1950. At the time of her arrival, the three-room office had 13 people working there, including Bill. It was a time when A.A.'s Traditions were just beginning to emerge, the General Service Conference was still in the discussion phase, and the Board of Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation (now General Service Board) was just starting to figure out its role.

Nell soon recognized the importance of Bill's correspondence and other material. She began going through his waste basket to retrieve and squirrel away material that would eventually be a basis for G.S.O.'s Archives, and be indispensable to scholars, writers and A.A. members in the years to come.

In 1973, Nell appeared twice on the Dick Cavett show, on broadcasts devoted to alcoholism. She explained the spiritual and psychological value of A.A.'s Traditions.

In the early 1970s, Nell turned her attention to the task of organizing the material that would form the basis of an archives: "With the advice of a professional librarian," she said, "I set about wading through and organizing mounds of accumulated correspondence and historical records." (Grapevine, Sept. 1977)

The trustees' Archives Committee was formed in 1973, and in 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, of course, the Archivist.

Nell knew everybody and remembered everything. She was a treasure trove of A.A. information. All one had to do was mention a name or event and Nell was off and running with more information than one could absorb. Always upbeat, with a beautiful winning smile, she never said a bad thing about anyone, one past staff member said. "With Nell," George observed, "A.A. matters are a labor of love."

In 1992, Nell's story of her years with A.A., *Grateful to Have Been There*, was published.

"From the beginning," Nell recalled, "I was caught by the A.A. Fellowship, particularly by the caring... a one-on-one caring, a love for one another without thought of any reward."

The Fellowship credits Nell with helping it attain a clearer sense of its history. "The fantastic success of A.A. is like a big puzzle and there are pieces that you know fit in, but you just don't know where until you look back into the past." (Nell in an interview in the Grapevine, June 1994)

In this photo from 1988, six years after her retirement from G.S.O., Nell is at Stepping Stones, the home of Bill W. and Lois. Nell was very close to Bill and his wife, and had her own room at their home.





Organizers of the Johannesburg Mini Rally, with its theme of “AASA@60,” had on display a sampling of archival material. The one-day event took place in November.

Celebrating 60 Years of Alcoholics Anonymous in South Africa

By Richard S.

As delegate of South Africa’s East Rand Area, I was appointed chairman of the committee to co-ordinate A.A. in South Africa’s 60th Anniversary commemorations. As part of this, I investigated our archives with a view to arriving at the basis of a local history. This has always been and will be for the foreseeable future an unofficial work-in-progress.

Due to office relocations, etc., the South Africa Archives were not in good shape. The archivist recently resigned his position, so I volunteered unofficially—my delegate duties preclude me from taking up dual posts—to sort them out. I used the A.A. publications as guidelines and also consulted a University of Johannesburg archivist in his capacity as a personal friend.

Among the archives material is the first Big Book owned by Solomon M., who was among the first to help start A.A. in South Africa. The book is dated 1947.

There is a professional archivist (who is an A.A. member) handling the Western Cape’s archives. The intention is to reduce significant quantities of the archive material to digital format to provide a mobile archive display for out-lying areas.

We converted to mp3 format a tape of our founder, Vale D., speaking, and another of Pat O’F., the first Cape Town person to contact A.A. New York. (There were three such contacts made, all independent of each other, and a fourth initiative made in Durban with the American consul at the time, also independent of the others.)

We have made the mp3’s available for purchase at a small mark-up, so South African Archives is beginning to be self-supporting.

Archives will feature prominently in this year’s delegates’ conference, where permission will be sought for the procurement of fireproof cabinets and the acquisition of second-hand flat display cases from the University of Johannesburg. A drive to involve all South African members in arriving at an official AASA history will also occur.

The General Service Office of South Africa has produced a limited edition embossed version of the pocket size Big Book in commemoration of the anniversary.

The Johannesburg Rally was attended by over 300 members (which is good for South Africa), representing 1,854 years of sobriety. It was held in a governmental alcohol rehabilitation centre, the manager of which is the woman who is in chairperson of our Board of Trustees.

Overall, I am happy to report that commemorations of “AASA@60” have gone exceedingly well.



The banner at the front of the main stage for the Johannesburg Mini Rally spells out the theme of the event.

How A.A. Made Its Way to Santa Fe, and What Happened Then

(This history was compiled by Jim L., District 2, Area 46 Archivist, based on a similar history written by Dennis M. in 1992.)

In 1941, Dr. Miles N. from Kansas City, Kansas, was in trouble. He had been drinking uncontrollably for over two years and was in a prison psychiatric unit. The judge was considering sending him to the state mental hospital. The doctor's wife brought him the Jack Alexander article, "Alcoholics Anonymous," which had just been published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and Dr. N. was struck sober. After he convinced the judge to let him return home to help other drunks, he started trolling skid row for prospects. Within a year, he opened a hospital for alcoholics in Kansas City. Over the next decades, Dr. N. sobered up hundreds and maybe thousands of people. Bill W. described him as "a prodigious A.A. worker and a national authority on the chemistry of drunks" (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, page 95).

Dr. N. often vacationed at a Santa Fe, New Mexico, resort called La Posada de Santa Fe. On a visit there in April 1946, his nephew, a local lawyer, told him about a man with a serious drinking problem. The man in question was Art S., a well-connected but very drunk accountant, who was living in his office in the building in which Dr. N.'s nephew worked. His wife had divorced him, and he could afford nowhere else to live. His accounting assistant kept him supplied with alcohol, and he would send out for food. Others working in the building considered calling the health department.

Art responded to a knock on his door. Dr. N. walked in and said, "Understand you're having a little trouble with alcohol." Then he told Art his own story and offered to take him back to La Posada to get sober. After some hesitation, Art agreed. Dr. N. detoxed him with the same recipe he used in Kansas City: two ounces of whiskey in four ounces of water every three hours for five doses, followed by the same every six hours for three doses, alternated with one teaspoon of salt in a glass of water every three hours between the diluted glasses of whiskey. It worked.

In the meantime, Dr. N. had somehow convinced Lenna, Art's ex-wife, to let Art move back in with her. Even though the divorce had been final since January, she let Art move into the front of the apartment. About six months later, they were remarried. Lenna was to join A.A. in 1948.

Before Dr. N. went home to Kansas City a few days after Easter, he told Art: "You will never need another drink the rest of your life. If you want to stay sober, you must get into

A.A. and *work at it*, and I really mean work at it!" Dr. N. became Art's first sponsor.

Art came together with three other alcoholics to form the Santa Fe Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, now known as the Downtown Group, in the spring of 1946.

As soon as it formed, the group, which grew to 30 members, became very active in Twelfth Step work. Numerous drunks were detoxed, using Dr. N.'s method. The group helped start other groups in Española, Las Vegas, Raton, and Taos. Soon after its founding, the group published a Spanish translation of a booklet from the A.A.s in Salt Lake City, "Who, me?" The booklet went on to be distributed in the thousands, mainly to Los Angeles and Southern California.

In 1947, with the cooperation of the warden of the state penitentiary, the Santa Fe Group began to take meetings to inmates. Soon, the inmates had formed their own A.A. group, called the Sundial Group, which for some time proudly called itself the first such group in A.A.

Also in 1947, Art and other New Mexico A.A. members successfully lobbied the state legislature to form and fund the New Mexico Commission on Alcoholism. The Commission was charged with studying the problem of alcoholism, including methods and facilities available for the care, custody and treatment of "persons addicted to the intemperate use of spirits or intoxicating liquids."

Until the mid-1960s, the two meetings a week of the Santa Fe Group were the only show in town. Then another group was formed. Still, by the late 1960s, there were only four meetings a week in the city. The 1980s, though, saw the rapid development of many new groups in Santa Fe. A men's group and a women's group had formed by 1981. In 1981 or 1982, gay and lesbian meetings were formed. Since the 1980s, as the need arose, other new groups have formed, while some of the older ones have folded.

The first Santa Fe Central Office was opened in the radio building on Marcy Street, where the rent was about \$200 per month. The office was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1989.

As with Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, Santa Fe A.A. has continued to grow and prosper and maintain its primary purpose: "to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers."



Shown here is the visitors' registrar in use by the Santa Fe Group of A.A. from 1948 to 1952. Four A.A. members founded the group, which was the city's first, in the spring of 1946.

Found: Burial Place of Florence R., One of First Women Sober in A.A.

*Submitted by the 2006 Archives Committee
of the Washington (D.C.) Area Intergroup Association*

Florence R. was among the first women to get sober in A.A., and the only one to write a story for the first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (Her story, “A Feminine Victory,” is now found in *Experience Strength and Hope* with others from the first three editions of the Big Book.)

In that story, written when she was a little more than a year sober, she says: “I am praying for inspiration to tell my story in a manner that may give other women who have this problem the courage to see it in its true light and seek the help that has given me a new lease on life.”

Florence died in April 1943, and her death certificate is among the holdings of the Washington Area Intergroup Association archives. It indicates she was buried at the George Washington Cemetery in Prince George’s County, Maryland.

We in the archives committee felt that as a part of A.A. history she was deserving of some commemoration, and so decided to locate her grave. We called the cemetery offices and asked if they had a grave site for Florence R. Their search proved negative. We then recalled that the death certificate was for Florence K. (her married name) and called the cemetery again with that name, and that did the trick. They had such a gravesite recorded April 1943.

Making arrangements with the cemetery offices, we arrived to continue our search. The caretaker provided a map and a marker and told us that they would give us help with our search. Two cemetery workers arrived with a shovel and a metal detector and off we went—to an unkempt part of the cemetery where there were no grave stones – just a lot of weeds, trees, and leaves. After much pacing off of distances, the two workers exclaimed, “Here it is!”

The workers used the shovel to clear the area so that the metal marker could be seen. We planted the flag marker and laid down a single flower.

The cemetery informed us how we could go about purchasing a gravestone and a motion was made asking for

money to do so at our next Washington Area Intergroup Association Board meeting. Consensus was that such a purchase was an outside matter and thus, it was inappropriate to use A.A. money. When we announced that private funds would be sought, we left the meeting with sufficient pledges to cover the cost of both the stone and its installation.

As a postscript, we want to mention that our archives contain a 1939 letter about Florence from one Fitz M. to Bill W., stating: “She is in love with a hellion 15 years younger than she who feeds her beer – so says her landlady.” We are now searching for further documentation concerning Florence. So far all we have is Fitz’s letter concerning her slip, which, at best, is hearsay.

Now Available from G.S.O. Archives: Oral Histories Kit and Collection Policy

- The Archives at the General Service Office has created a new service piece, the Oral Histories Kit, designed to assist those wishing to interview longtimers in their group, district, or area. The kit contains tips, instructions, forms and releases, a biographical sketch, suggested questions to ask, and a list of additional resources.

It is available on the G.S.O.’s AA web site (www.aa.org) as a PDF. Simply go to the Archives Portal and click on “Resources for AA Archivists.” You can also contact the Archives staff to receive your free copy by mail or e-mail.

- The trustees’ Archives Committee has also approved a new Collection Policy, detailing our procedures for accepting donations of archival material, and describing generally what we collect and what we do not, and why. It also explains our means of removing items from the collection, should that become necessary.

The G.S.O. Archives Collection Policy, naturally, relates only to the G.S.O.’s collections, but it is hoped that it may be helpful for district, area, and Intergroup/central office archives that are struggling with similar questions about which records to keep permanently in the archives, and how to handle donations to the archives.

This policy is now available on the web site and will be published in the next printing of the Archives Workbook. Please contact the Archives for more information or to obtain a copy of the policy.

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