



# MARKINGS

c/o G.S.O.  
468 PARK AVENUE SOUTH  
NEW YORK, NY 10016

YOUR ARCHIVES INTERCHANGE

VOL. XII • No. 1 — 1992

## 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

