

Archives Workshops: A Community Assembles and Grows

Two recent years of weekend sessions, named the Archives Workshop, have developed and celebrated a genuine continuity of spirit by the participants traveling to Akron, Ohio in the early autumn of 1996 and 1997. This excerpt from its Mission Statement speaks of its simple purpose: "The Archives Workshop makes its commitment to A.A. Archivists and Archives Committees who are working within the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous and are bound by the spiritual principles of our Fellowship." Making A.A. history has also been one unintended outcome, allowing our Fellowship a new and open forum of ideas shared between lovers of archives, longtime A.A. members, archives committees, and active serving A.A. archivists.

In the city where Alcoholics Anonymous began in the spring of 1935, the Archives Workshop participants of 1996 had sensed that the new weekend conference had proven its value by meeting their need to assemble and share. The only "motion" voted on was unanimously cast to hold a second Archives Workshop at Akron in 1997, and in 1997 the only vote taken was again unanimous for holding a third Akron weekend session for 1998.

Beginning with a small number of announcement flyers and word-of-mouth throughout the A.A. Archives community, 93 registered for the first Workshop sessions held October 25, 26, & 27, 1996. One hundred and twenty-three registered for the 1997 Archives Workshop held September 26, 27, and 28 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel. Participants arrived from A.A. Areas in over twenty U.S. states and Canadian provinces for a lively weekend emphasizing the exchange of ideas.

Hosted by the Akron Intergroup but organized and chaired by the Akron Intergroup Archivist, Gail L., the restored sections of the Mayflower Hotel (currently named the Mayflower Manor, an assisted-living facility) served as the central site for the first year's Workshop sessions. A beautiful and unique gift was dedicated Friday night's kickoff session. With its exterior and walkup lobby restored to mid-1930's opulence, a new and permanent installation was unveiled in the Mayflower's lobby, created from photographs and the artistic efforts of Akron Archives members. Facing a framed photo on the opposite wall of the oval lobby, a 1930s-era pay telephone and a replica of the hotel's 1935 Church Directory were placed next to the original location of telephone booths. An Akron policeman, serving as security for the site, gave away a seemingly unending supply of nickels for the telephone, and its bell (minus the dial tone) rang throughout the entire weekend.

Friday night's kickoff attendees were treated to a short tour of the Mayflower's past layout, also including where the bar and hotel desk were located. A great sense of the site's history was given in a talk from a retired switchboard operator, speaking on the hotel's relation to Akron and early Alcoholics Anonymous. Other longtime Akron A.A. members spoke, all participants introduced themselves, and the weekend's varied itinerary was announced by Gail's welcoming remarks.

Each year's Archives Workshop held multi-track activities for its Saturday afternoon sessions. The University of Akron Archives, from across the side street of the Mayflower, opened for a guided tour each year. The Akron Archives, located in the Intergroup office north of the downtown area, also greeted Workshop participants. Guided tours of the Akron historical A.A. sites were given by volunteers, many of whom serve as Group Archives representatives. The

personal perspective given to the many small groups of "A.A. tourists" delivered a much-appreciated insight on Akron's place in A.A. history, and the agreeable fall weather was a definite plus each year. Back at the Mayflower, Bob W., Area 4 Arkansas Archivist, chaired a very informative, hands-on training session in conservation techniques and procedures. Bob chaired two levels of introductory and advanced sessions at the second Archives Workshop, held at 1997's central site of the Ramada Plaza Hotel.

The added Breakout Sessions for 1997's Workshop included a slide presentation and tour of the A.A. Archives at Little Rock, Arkansas, given by Fay W., Area 4's Assistant Archivist, in her presentation on "Starting an Archives." The auditorium at the Ramada Plaza Hotel was further sectioned off for an Authors Panel. Sharing was given by Sue W. (*Children of the Healer*), Mel B. (*New Wine* and contributing author for *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*), Mary D. (*Sister Ignatia, Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous*), and Ernie K. (*Not-God* and *The Spirituality of Imperfection*).

All the participants at the first and second Workshop were invited to an after-hours Open House at the restored site of Dr. Bob's home. Following the Saturday night Speaker-led Open meeting, many visited the house and shared fellowship late into the night, filling its kitchen, living room, front porch, and spilling over to the foundation's Archives next door.

The speakers at the Opening Meetings of Friday night kickoffs included former staff of the Mayflower Hotel and vignettes of Akron history from local longtime A.A. members. In 1997 the entire podium of the auditorium of the Ramada Plaza Hotel was filled with A.A. members traveling to the Workshop from Iowa, Illinois, Florida, Texas, Michigan, Oklahoma, as well as Ohio. The '97 Old Timers Panel also continued out into the entire room with over two dozen AAs briefly sharing their long lives in the Fellowship. Question and answer sessions followed the personal histories. This active spirit of openness, community, and unity effectively set the tone for the entire Archives Workshop weekend each year.

On Saturday night in 1996, David A. of Texas, past A.A.W.S. Class B Trustee and active many years in service [since deceased], delivered a prepared talk from his own research on "The Writing of the Big Book." As many of us know some of the more humorous events in that great undertaking of 1939, David's keen insight and quick Texas wit energized the atmosphere of the Open Meeting that completely filled the Mayflower's dining room.

The same level of energy was duplicated in 1997 by historian and author Ernie K., of Michigan, in his Open Meeting talk on the "Varieties of A.A. Histories." Currently a tenured Professor of Rutgers University in New Jersey, Ernie researched the well-known definitive history of Alcoholics Anonymous titled *Not-God*. He shared, with an exciting archival perspective, themes of the different disciplines that comprise the recovery program of A.A. today, and he spoke of both the benefits and dangers that new disciplines currently bring to our Fellowship. Both year's speakers spoke directly to the A.A. Archives community gathered at the Workshops.

The same feeling of community carried over to each year's morning sessions. The open forum and free exchange of ideas characterized the tone of all Sharing Sessions and Presentation talks, truly voicing our "language of the heart" relating to A.A. Archives service. The highlights and

topics can only effectively get listed in their chronological order, with this report's addition of one outstanding presence and the Workshops' welcome to [nonalcoholic] Judit Santon, then Assistant Archivist at the General Service Office, and currently serving A.A. as the GSO Archivist.

In 1996 the following Presentations and Sharing were heard at the Mayflower:

Saturday morning, the emphasis on ethics and archives service---

1. Traditions and Archives---David A., of Dallas, Texas
2. Guidelines for Area and Intergroup Archivists---Fay W., of Area 4 Arkansas Archives (much developed here for the needed input requested by the Trustees Archives Committee for assembling a new A.A. Guideline on Archival Committees).

Sunday morning, Archivist Panel and Sharing---

1. The Workings of the Area 4 Arkansas Archives---Fay W. of Little Rock.
2. Computer Databases of Materials---Area 4 Arkansas Archives
3. Classification Policies---Judit Santon, GSO Archives (Judit also read from early correspondence between Akron, Cleveland, Florida, and the offices of the Alcoholic Foundation at New York City).
4. One Areas Success in Publishing a Comprehensive History---Rick T., Area 20 (nothern Illinois) Historian.
5. A long-distance telephone call to NYC in tribute to Nell Wing, celebrating her many years of service to A.A. Archives and advising her that a special, hand-painted plaque was getting sent from the Workshop.

In 1997, Presentation and sharing at the Ramada Plaza site:

Saturday morning, Early A.A. Publications and Newsletters Panel---Gail L. of Akron Archives, Wally Z. of Chicago Archives, Ron R. of SE Pennsylvania Intergroup Archives, and Judit Santon of GSO Archives.

Sunday morning Archivist Panel and closing Sharing Session---

1. Discussion of the Final Draft of the new A.A. Guideline on Archives---Judit from GSO
2. Access and Classification of Items---Judit from GSO, also describing the scope and responsibilities of the Trustees Archives Committee.
3. Finders Aids and Database Retrieval---Paul L. of the Stepping Stones Foundation (Bill and Lois' restored home in Bedford Hills, NY).
4. Anonymity and A.A. Archives---Fay W. of Area 4 Arkansas Archives.
5. Presentation of farewell letter and greeting from Frank M., retiring Archivist at the General Service Office [since deceased]---Gail L. of Akron Archives.

6. A "Brainstorming" Sharing Session on the Conference Policy and Admissions 1997 Survey for input toward establishing a Conference Archives Committee at the 1998 General Service Conference---Delegate Bob McK. Of Area 54 N.E. Ohio and Delegate Laura Z. of Area 19 Chicago, Moderators. The need for Archives Workshop participants to contact their Area Delegates with their ideas was emphasized.

The 1998 Archives Workshop will again be held in Akron, Ohio on a weekend this fall. Inquiries can be directed to the Akron Archives, c/o Akron Intergroup Office, 775 North Main Street, Akron, OH 44310.

Participants realize that the Workshop derives no authority for any advisory actions, but provides a forum for the increasing community and presence of A.A. Archives. To this purpose, the complete draft of the Mission Statement closes this report, as its length would not fit on the 1997 Program:

"The Archives Workshop makes its commitment to A.A. Archivists and Archives Committees who are working within the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous and who are bound by the spiritual principles of our Fellowship. The Workshop's focus on the open sharing of experience, strength, and hope can renew our energized efforts. Communication between A.A. Archivists is an achievable goal. We share information, methods, procedures, ethics, and our enthusiasm as we continue to gather, grow, and serve.

"Consistent with A.A.'s primary purpose, A.A. Archivists attempt to help the still suffering alcoholic by preserving the integrity of both the A.A. message and the history of the Fellowship, for those members present and those yet to come. When our unity, spirit, and the support for the A.A. Archives effort develops and prospers, and when our service brings further study, attraction, and participation, then we are once again successful in carrying the message."

Rick T., Area 20 (northern Illinois) Archivist, Algonquin, Illinois, 2/18/98