

National Archives Workshop Celebrates 75 Years of the A.A. Story

By Dick A., Georgia, Co-Chair 14th N.A.A.A.W.

In a year filled with special celebrations of A.A.'s 75th anniversary, including Founders Day in Akron and the A.A. International in San Antonio, one event may be the most important in preserving that history.

From September 23-26, the men and women who devote much of their lives to recording and preserving the A.A. story met to celebrate that process and share their hopes, knowledge and experience with each other. The event—which attracted more than 150 attendees, including area archivists from all over North America—was the fourteenth annual National A.A. Archives Workshop.

The event was held in Macon, Georgia—an historic site itself, featuring museums that honor everything from America's music to the arts and sciences. The workshop kicked off Thursday night with a welcome by workshop chair Ross McC. of Georgia, followed by the seemingly immortal Mel B. from Ohio, who shared his first-hand experience with over 60 years of A.A. history.

Mel, who had his last drink in 1950, knew Bill W. well enough that the co-founder trusted him to write Bill's biography.

Bill B. from South Carolina and New York—another of our Fellowship's great storytellers—was also in attendance. Bill is the screenwriter of the films "My Name is Bill W." and, more recently, "When Love is Not Enough: The Lois Wilson Story."

This N.A.A.A.W. was "A 3-Day Event Honoring 75 Years of the AA Story!" But any story is only valuable when it's passed along. That's the A.A. way. And that's exactly what this workshop was about.

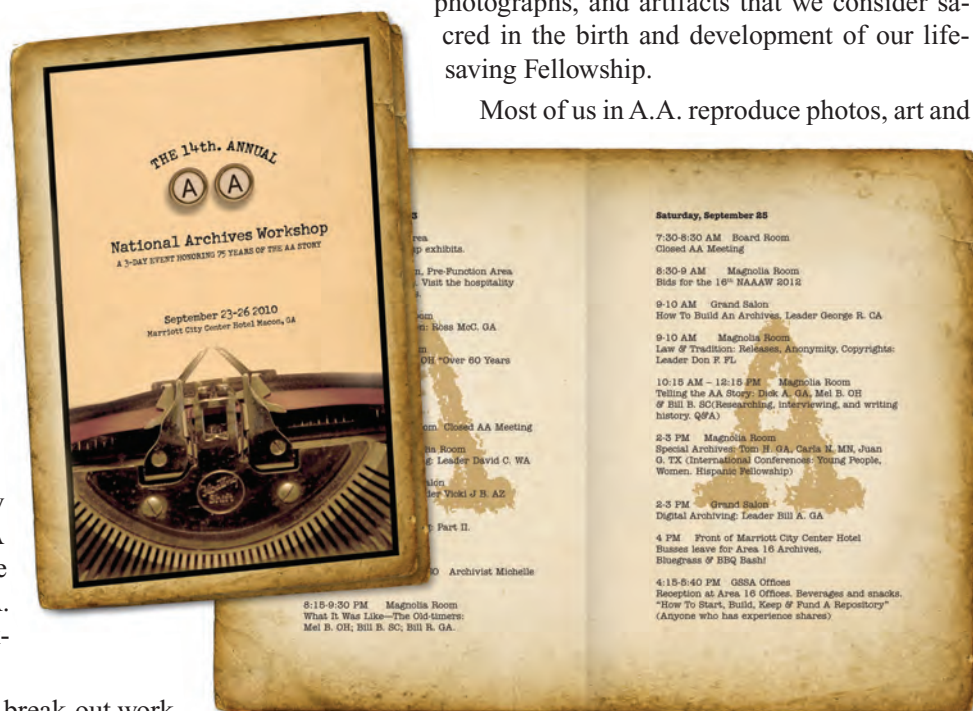
Friday and Saturday were filled with break-out workshops that showed even the most experienced archivist new ways to record, write, conserve and preserve, mount and display everything from books to original photography and historic documents.

David C. from Washington State led an all-day workshop titled "Conserving and Preserving." Current, past, and would-be archivists sat around tables and got invaluable hands-on experience with each phase of each process.

Vicki Jo B. of Arizona chaired a session titled "The Ethical Archivist," a timely topic, given that many areas are acquiring their own archives. In the past, many archivists were also collectors and personally owned the memorabilia they displayed at area events. Archiving our history at any level is relatively new, and ethical guidelines are still developing.

G.S.O. Archivist Michelle Mirza of New York was one of several presenters to employ audio visual, which she used in her presentation about how G.S.O. organizes and displays our official archives at the New York office. For those who've not made the pilgrimage to Riverside and 120th St. in Manhattan, it was a first glimpse of many of the books, photographs, and artifacts that we consider sacred in the birth and development of our life-saving Fellowship.

Most of us in A.A. reproduce photos, art and



The antique look of the sepia colored program for the 14th Annual National Archives Workshop reflects the event's mission of promoting the preservation of A.A. collections that tell the story of the Fellowship's history. Listed on the program are the various workshops and presentations offered at the three-day event.

writing without asking, and hand them out as though we created the original. But Don F., an attorney from Florida, laid down the law in a workshop entitled “Law & Tradition: Releases, Anonymity, and Copyrights.”

It’s also important—including having legal ramifications—to know how to research and write any story about A.A., its Fellowship, and individuals. Especially in light of the Internet, it was agreed that many sites and individuals pass along information that is not factually based. Because we rarely take punitive action toward each other in our Fellowship, there can be more chance of passing along information that hasn’t been verified. A panel of three professional writers who have written about A.A.—Mel B., Bill B., and this writer—shared experience in researching and verifying any A.A. story before passing it on—in print, on film, or on the Internet. All three agreed that a minimum of three reliable sources was necessary. The audience was treated to first-hand stories from Mel and Bill about Bill and Lois and moments they shared with these writers.

Some of us are lucky enough to fund and outfit repositories in our areas to store, preserve, and display all kinds of historic content. All attendees were given a tour of the Area 16 repository situated in the area office building in Macon, Georgia. The visit prompted a vital discussion of such repositories—how to start, build, maintain, and finance them.

There were more workshops, along with many conversations in the halls and over meals and in the hospitality room.



This exhibit from Cocoa Beach, Florida, was one of several set up by local archivists from around the country who attended the event, which was held in Macon, Georgia. Florida won its bid to host the event in 2012.



One all-day workshop at N.A.A.A.W. was titled “Conserving and Preserving,” at which attendees had the opportunity for hands-on experience with the work of ensuring that A.A.’s artifacts and documents are safely stored.

On Saturday night, the group got a real taste of Southern hospitality when they drove to Lake Tobesofkee and dined on the best barbeque and catfish in the area at Fish ‘n Pig. Bluegrass and Southern harmony brought out the smile in all who attended.

The Saturday evening session featured a special showing of the Hallmark film “When Love is Not Enough: The Lois Wilson Story,” with comments from its screenwriter Bill B.

The workshop ended on Sunday with a business meeting that reached its end by awarding Orlando, Florida, with the opportunity to host the 2012 National A.A. Archives Workshop. The 2011 site, selected at the 2009 business meeting, will be Helena, Montana.

Throughout the weekend, it became apparent that attendees agreed on one very important point: as a fellowship, we have to know where we have come from to survive into the future!

Registration Info for 15th N.A.A.A.W.

The 15th Annual National AA Archives Workshop will take place September 22-25, 2011 in Helena, Montana. The theme of the event will be “Mining our past, minding our future.” For more information or to obtain a registration form, go to the event website at www.aanationalarchivesworkshop.com, or contact Gerry R. at 406-933-5342, or by email at traditionsway@yahoo.com.

Finding Aids Provide Roadmap to Collections

An important tool used by archivists to provide information about the collections in their repositories is finding aids. They describe the contents of the collection while also providing historical or biographical background. The components of finding aids are fairly standardized, although they can be arranged in whatever manner seems appropriate. Obviously, the first part of any finding aid is the title, though the correct choice of title may not be obvious. In many cases, however, the choice may be simplified by the content of the collection. A collection predominantly referring to the life and activities of John Smith, for instance, would be the “John Smith Collection.”

Collections, though, often contain material pertaining to a wide variety of people, events, or topics, and its main focus may not be readily apparent. Moreover, depending on the material, it may not be appropriate to name the collection after its creator, donor, or owner. While the predominant subject of a collection is typically the source of its name, this is not always the case. For example, a collection about delegate Mary Doe would carry a title like “Delegate Records: Mary Doe.” Even though she is the creator or focus of the material, her function as delegate takes precedence because she is a single member of the larger concept of “delegates.” Essentially, the primary focus of a collection should probably serve as its title.

The first section within a finding aid is a summary for the collection as a whole. Typically this area will include basic information about the creator, the donor, the range of dates, the quantity of materials, any languages present, the processor or processors, as well as an abstract and a restatement of the title for the collection. All of these sections, and any others which you may wish to add, consist of very short entries, typically only a few words each. The sole exception to this is the abstract, which describes in about one or two short paragraphs all of the information about the collection. It is a good idea to use consistent terminology among your finding aids, and to avoid leaving sections blank or incomplete. As this is the first section of the finding aid that a researcher is likely to see, it is important that it contain all of the summary information and that it be as clear as possible.

Often, the next area is the biographical or historical note. This area is mostly background, and may not directly describe the contents of the collection. Usually, the biographical note is added when the subject is an individual, and the historical note is used when the collection deals with an organization or event. A brief synopsis is typically all that is necessary here, unless more detail is required for a user to understand the background of the material.

While the collection itself may provide a sufficient amount of information for this area, it may be necessary to seek outside sources to describe the subject in question. If you do need to use outside sources, be sure to provide proper citations to indicate where you acquired the information.



Finding aids simplify the task of filing and accessing the mass of documents found in collections. An effective finding aid will describe the contents of the collection while also providing historical or biographical background.

Remember that you are not describing the material per se, but rather the creator or subject of the collection. Consider what background a researcher would need to know about the material in the collection, and include that information in this section. For example, if you have a collection of correspondence, ask yourself what you would want to know before using the material, and put that information here.

The scope and content note is usually the next section. In general, this area describes the characteristics of the collection. The information contained in the collection is briefly summarized, providing a general overview of the materials. Here, information about the date ranges, formats, and physical aspects of the materials (including their extent), and the subjects, topics, personalities, and events included within the collection, are mentioned. Typically, the most central, important, or interesting aspects of a collection are described here.

Information about any access restrictions and the preferred citation for the collection is often listed next. Typically, restrictions to a collection are imposed by the donor of the material who wishes to protect some aspect of the collection. The archivist will also often add restrictions to materials if they have a policy which prohibits the use of certain materials by researchers. A.A. archivists, of course, will need to ensure that the anonymity of members mentioned in the col-

lection is protected in some manner. If any of these factors, or others not mentioned, applies to the collection, it should be described in the finding aid. The area for preferred citation is included to indicate to researchers how the material, the archives, or the donor should be credited.

The section for arrangement, usually listed next, explains the method used by the archivist in sorting and processing

New York's Trafalgar Group Celebrates 50 Years

The Trafalgar Group in New York City recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary, having been listed at New York's Intergroup office on October 13, 1960. Trafalgar was listed at the General Service Office when a member—Penny Fox M.—wrote to report the group's concern about some of its members violating the anonymity of others. That was in April 1962.



The next time the group contacted G.S.O. was four years later in a letter from member Katrina M.G., which accompanied a donation of \$45. She writes: "This is the first time that the Trafalgar Group has been able to support General Services.... However, in the past six or seven months, our finances have improved...Our membership, which has been 15 is now also increasing.... Additional contributions will be sent to you as our finances' timing allows... It is a pleasure and satisfaction to all of our group to be able to join in support of General Services."

For years, the group met in two places on the Upper East Side of Manhattan—All Souls Unitarian Church and the Madison Avenue Presbyterian—with meetings at 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The group information card from March 27, 1973 on file at the G.S.O. listed 150 members, and a group information sheet from June 23, 1995 listed 120 members.

Trafalgar moved to Central Presbyterian Church in 1980, where it held four meetings on Tuesday evening: a 6:15 closed meeting; 7:30 Step; 7:30 beginners meeting, and 8:30 open discussion meeting. This past year it moved to the Caron Foundation, where it meets on Tuesday evening at 6:45 for a closed discussion meeting.

As one current member remembers it, "Trafalgar, sometimes affectionately referred to as 'Traflaky,' was known as having one of the best Step meetings in town in the early 1970s. There were hundreds in attendance at the various meetings, and this group saved many alcoholic lives. Some fell in love at Trafalgar and some got divorced and some had funerals in the church where the group met. May Trafalgar live another 50 years."

the materials. Whether the original order of the collection was maintained or an entirely new system has been used to order the material, the activities of the archivist are included here. Additionally, this section details the series and sub-series of the collection, and briefly explains why the materials are sorted in their present manner. The researcher is also told if there are any alphabetical, chronological, or other organizational schemes in use throughout or within the collection.

Arrangement is often followed closely by description, which may be interwoven with the container listing, mentioned below. Description, as its name implies, is the area in a finding aid in which a unit within the collection, such as a series, sub-series, box, or other component, is detailed and explained. Important subjects, topics, individuals, or events within the unit are highlighted, and the relevance of the material is made clear to any potential users. It is helpful to think of what a researcher would want when using this collection, and emphasize the presence of any material which could be of value to them. Rare or unique materials are often mentioned.

Usually, the last part of the finding aid is the container listing. This is, basically, an inventory of the materials in the collection used to indicate exactly what is in the collection. While an entry can be created for each box or each item, it is most common for container listings to catalog material at the folder level. The titles of the folders are listed, and the dates encompassed by the material inside are also recorded here. It is always helpful to have descriptive titles for each folder (such as "Meeting Minutes, 1990-1995" or "Correspondence, 1984-1986"), as this will allow for faster searching and assist in the location of materials. The number of the box within the collection that houses the folder, and the number of the folder within each box, is also included, so the material can be located and accessed quickly. The container list may also note the number of pages in each folder and any other extraneous or miscellaneous information about individual folders.

There are other elements in finding aids which are not commonly used by the G.S.O. Archives, but which may be useful for other repositories. A section for the condition of the material, or for preservation concerns, lists the state of the items in the collection and any efforts to preserve or protect the materials. Information on the location of the material may also be included, not only to help the staff of the archives find the collection, but also to inform readers if the material is off-site, on loan, sent for preservation work, or located at another repository. Any closely related collections, located either in your archive or another repository, can also be mentioned to help researchers continue their work with other collections. The provenance of the collection, which outlines any known creators, holders, and movements of the collection throughout its history, is also a common section.

As with all archival collections, all finding aids are unique. Any and all of the elements mentioned above may be

used in a finding aid, arranged in any order and filled in any way. What is mentioned here are suggestions, because it is impossible to provide fixed rules. If a finding aid conveys to researchers the contents and importance of the materials in a collection, and helps users to locate the information they need, it can be considered successful.

1) “Archival Finding Aids at Library of Congress: Encoded Archival Description (EAD)” (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/ead/>)

2) “SAA: Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology:

Finding Aid” (http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=66)

3) “Finding aid—Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finding_aid)

4) Central New York Libraries Research Council Documentary Heritage Program How to Create Finding Aids (http://www.clrc.org/dhp2006/find_aid.php)

5) “Writing Your Own Finding Aids—Connecticut State Library Home Page” (http://www.clrc.org/dhp2006/find_aid.php)



*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!*