

## Preserving Books Requires Proper Storage and Handling

Many archives contain books in varying states of deterioration, but preserving every one of them is usually not feasible. A plan consisting of the following steps, however, offers a practical way of addressing the problem:

- Assessment of the importance and condition of the items in the collection;
- Identification of the various problems;
- Determination of necessary treatments and assignment of priority.

The G.S.O. Archives Library Collection consists of more than 2,500 books on A.A. and alcoholism, including archival copies of various printings of our own conference-approved literature. The library boasts an impressive collection of books read by early A.A. members and Oxford Groupers, as well as books on the Temperance Society and Washingtonian Movement. Some books are quite old, dating over 125 years.

### The Storage Environment

Caring for books includes proper handling and storage principles. Library collections should be kept in a cool, clean and low-light area to ensure their longevity. Light accelerates the aging process of paper, weakening the paper fibers and causing brittleness, discoloration and fading. Do not store books in areas where they are exposed to direct sunlight or harsh ultraviolet light, and dust. It is best to store books away from plumbing and water pipes and never in attics or basements. The varying temperature and humidity in these areas can attract pests (e.g. silverfish, cockroaches, mice), promote the potential for mold and mildew growth, and can dry out leather bindings and cockle pages.

Food and beverages should never come close to library materials. Aside from the risk of contaminating the materials in the event of a spill, food and drinks increase the risk of pest infestation.

Generally, books should be supported upright on the shelf by other books or bookends. Do not overcrowd the shelves; instead leave sufficient room to allow air to circulate. Very large or fragile books should be stored flat on the shelf; otherwise the weight of the paper can damage the binding.

Photocopying is one of the major causes of damage to library books. A basic rule to observe when photocopying books is to *never* press down on the spine to flatten the book. Also, do not

close the lid of the copier on the book. Simply—and with care—lay the desired page onto the copier.

### Handling and Use

Careful handling of books will preserve them. If care is not taken in retrieving, transporting, storing and photocopying books, damage will occur. Hands should always be clean and dry when touching paper. Oil from the skin and perspiration discolor paper. Ideally, clean cotton gloves should be used when handling books. When retrieving a book from a shelf, refrain from pulling the book by the spine; this causes damage to the headcap, or may, over time, cause the spine to detach. The better practice is to pull the book from the shelf by pushing the two books adjacent to it inward. Do not leave gaps between books left on the shelf because they may tip over, causing severe distortion or damage. Use bookends to help support books.

When working with library materials, provide yourself with sufficient clean work space and keep items flat on the table and not held in your hands. If the book you are working with is fragile, you might consider placing it on a book cradle for added support.

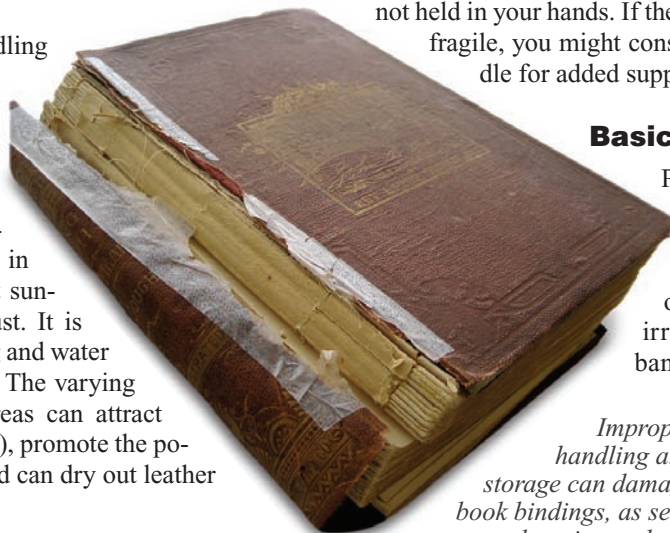
### Basic Processing Tasks

Paper clips, metal fasteners, pins, and staples should never be left on books being stored. Over time, air oxidizes the metal and causes irreversible rust stains. Rubber bands or strings should also be removed because they can curl and tear the edges of paper; rubber bands weaken over time and break. Carefully unfold pages that are folded down. However,

do not attempt to uncrease brittle paper because that may cause it to break.

Use a dust brush to remove excessive dirt and dust. These and other cleaning tools, such as gum erasers, can be purchased at any archival supplier. It is important to carefully consider the condition of the material prior to attempting to clean it. Brittle paper should not be cleaned, since abrasive action can cause it to tear. Any kind of soil removal must always be undertaken with care.

You may also make quick repairs on torn pages by using



*Improper handling and storage can damage book bindings, as seen here in a volume from 1884.*

pressure sensitive mending tissue. Never repair or mend torn pages with acidic adhesives or other tapes that would become brittle and leave stains or residue.

### Preservation Enclosures

Wrappers, folders, slipcases and boxes—referred to as enclosures—can serve as either a temporary or a permanent means of protecting books and other materials from light, dust, and excessive or rough handling. Enclosures are safe, economical, and relatively simple to make; they lend support to fragile materials; and they keep components securely in one place. Enclosures serve to retard deterioration, without physically altering the material. There are various suppliers of archival quality materials and they include easy how-to guides. Examples of enclosures are storage wrappers and custom-made boxes.

#### Storage Wrappers

Books that are to be placed into storage for an indefinite time should be wrapped to protect them. Wrappers are the most economical enclosures to make and can serve as permanent containers for books that do not warrant costly treatment. The wrapper should be:



- Acid-free
- Chemically inert
- Water-resistant
- Have a smooth surface
- Resist mold and mildew.

#### Custom-made Boxes

Custom-made boxes offer an excellent solution for soft cover or fragile books with damaged corners and edges that need a rigid and permanent support. Most archival suppliers sell acid-free, adjustable paper stock that can be used to create a customized box. If storing volumes into an archival box, place the volumes with the spine facing down.

As indicated, some of the most effective ways for addressing preservation issues are simple and inexpensive. Future issues of *Markings* will cover preservation principles for other printed materials. These methods are intended as practical and economical solutions to preserve printed materials. They are not intended as a substitute for the services of a trained professional conservator or restorer.

For more information, consult the following web pages\*, or contact the G.S.O. Archives if you have specific questions: 212-870-3400; archives@aa.org.

- “Preservation Supplies and Services”—  
Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)  
<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/suppliers.php>
- “Care, Handling and Storage of Books”—  
The Library of Congress  
<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/presfaq.html>
- “Care of Library Materials”—  
Northwestern University Library  
<http://www.library.northwestern.edu/preservation/chlm/>

\**Note: The G.S.O. Archives has provided these articles as a resource only, and does not endorse nor affirm any of the content on these sites.*

## Membership Rules Presented Hurdle to Early A.A. Prospects

Becoming a member of an A.A. group in the early years of the Fellowship was not always the straightforward affair it is today. Some A.A. groups drew up strict rules for membership covering issues ranging from slips to money loaned among members. The Wilson Club, a meeting space for A.A. groups in St. Louis, spelled out its expectations for members in 1942 in formal, no-nonsense language:

“The Wilson Club does not condone ‘slipping’ nor does it welcome habitual slippers and ‘back-door’ A.A.’s to its membership.

“Upon his or her first slip he shall admit his drunkenness to the group,” and “upon his second slip he shall turn in his membership card.” Then, “upon his third slip he shall be automatically expelled from the club, it being assumed that the club can do nothing for him and that he is a detrimental influence to the membership.”

The Wilson Club had this to say about money lent by a member to a newcomer: “that money shall constitute a trust in the hands of the person rehabilitated and shall be PAID BACK to the party or parties advancing it regardless of whether the person advancing it wants it or not.”

Though such rigid directions touching on the behavior of group members will sound foreign—if not bizarre—to today’s A.A. member, rules were not uncommon.

In Little Rock, Ark., A.A. members were initiated into Alcoholics Anonymous through a regimen known as the “Little Rock Plan.” In an account sent to the Grapevine by A.A. members from Little Rock, they write: “It is not easy to become a member of this group. When a person has expressed a desire to achieve sobriety and has had a sponsor appointed to him, he must leave his work or position for at least two weeks. Usually, the prospect is required to spend that entire time within the confines of the club rooms, studying, preparing a case history, and meeting and filling assignments laid out by the sponsor.

“If, after two weeks, he has discharged his assignments to the satisfaction of his sponsor, he is brought before the executive committee and there his request for membership is presented.”

Published in August 1946, the article explains that if the prospective member clears this hurdle, he then must keep a diary for 28 days, ending every day’s entry by writing: “I have not taken a drink today,” and signing his name.

For dealing with members who suffer a slip, “There is the ‘slip squad,’ where the man who has suffered a setback ... must serve from two weeks to six months before he is again recognized as a full-fledged member.”

During these early years, the Grapevine published a number of such reports from groups detailing how they operated. An editor’s note from an issue at the time introduces a report from Rochester, NY, published in September 1947: “This is the third in a continuing series of articles outlining the various indoctrination plans followed by different groups throughout the country.”

According to Rochester A.A. members who contributed the Grapevine article: “It has been our observation that bringing men into the group indiscriminately, and without adequate train-

ing and information, can be a source of great harm to the general morale of the group itself.”

About 1942 or 1943, the Central Office in New York asked groups to send in their membership rules—and was shocked by their number and variety.

Bill, writing in the August 1946 issue of the *Grapevine*, says: “A little reflection on these rules brought us to an astonishing conclusion. If all of these edicts had been in force everywhere at once it would have been practically impossible for any alcoholic to have ever joined Alcoholics Anonymous. About nine-tenths of our oldest and best members could never have got by!”

As Bill also noted, “we oldtimers could have been excluded for our failure to read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* or the refusal of our sponsor to vouch for us as a candidate.”

He sums things up by saying: “At one time or another most A.A. groups go on rule-making benders.”

An excerpt from Tradition Three (page 139 in the *Twelve and Twelve*) offers an explanation on the phenomenon: “A member gives us a vivid glimpse of those days. ‘At one time,’ he says, ‘every A.A. group had many membership rules. Everybody was scared witless that something or somebody would capsize the boat and dump us all back into the drink.’”

Membership regulations were, however, local initiatives, and

there were other groups in the 1940s with no such requirements. An accepted principle of A.A. is that anyone is a member of A.A. who says he is, and this has been the case since the early days of the Fellowship. As spelled out in the first edition of the *Big Book*, published in 1939, “the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.”

Touching on this principle, Bill writes in a letter dated January 1951 that: “...some of our local Groups do make membership rules. How much legal validity they have is a question. ... While a member’s Group can physically exclude him from a particular meeting that does not, traditionally, deprive him of A.A. membership.”

A confirmation, though, that the hearts of these early A.A. members were in the right place comes from a member of one of these rule-bound groups: “These by-laws really sound more rigid than they are, and have caused some misunderstanding.” The rule on slips, he said in a letter to the *Grapevine*, “does not mean that each of us individually will not help a man in every possible way after his third slip.”

Eventually, the rule-making mania subsided. According to Tradition Three (page 141): “At last experience taught us that to take away any alcoholic’s full chance was sometimes to pronounce his death sentence.... As group after group saw these possibilities, they finally abandoned all membership requirements.”

## When Bill W. Made His Case for a General Service Conference of A.A.

In 1951, A.A.’s co-founder Bill W. gave a talk on the need for an annual meeting that would bring A.A. members from around the U.S. and Canada into contact with the New York office, then called Headquarters.

Speaking to an A.A. assembly in Chicago, Bill opened by asking, “My friends, supposing that A.A. had come to each of you 10 years late?” He goes on to say that A.A. services “must go on ... that only by services can we as groups, areas, and A.A. as a whole function.”

To do this, Bill said, “we are proposing something to be called the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. Not a large body of people — one, two, or three at the most from every state and province — to bring down to New York as your representatives to sit down with Dr. Bob’s friends and mine, the trustees, once a year.”

[Dr. Bob had given his blessing to the plan a short time before he died in November 1950.]

The purpose, according to Bill, was to “back up [those at Headquarters] and give them a cross-section of A.A. opinions; to advise them; offer a chance to correct them if someday they should get out of line. And, see, therefore, that our lifeline to the millions we don’t know are preserved; that our literature remains standard; that our public relations are really looked at there; that these vital chores continue to be done.”

A.A. had grown tremendously in the years since the Alcoholic Foundation had been created in 1938, when there were barely 100 A.A. members. In 1946, when membership had reached about 30,000, Bill began formulating his plan for some kind of conference.

As Bill said in his speech in Chicago, “some may still say,



*A general session of the 1954 General Service Conference, which met at the Commodore Hotel in New York. This was the last of the four trial Conferences testing whether Bill’s idea for such an annual meeting was viable.*

‘why can’t we leave that ... to Dr. Bob and Bill and their friends the trustees? We always have. Why do they now bother us with such business? Let’s keep A.A. simple.’”

In response, Bill said: “the trustees are almost unknown to the A.A. movement” and “in future years ... couldn’t possibly function without direct guidance from A.A. itself. Somebody



must advise them. Somebody or something must take the place of Dr. Bob and Bill. ...Alcoholics Anonymous is out of its infancy, grown up, adult now. It has a full right and the plain duty to take direct responsibility for its own headquarters.”

As Bill saw it, there was no other way. “Unless the Foundation is firmly anchored to state and provincial representatives, to the movement it serves, a headquarters breakdown will someday be inevitable. ...An isolated Foundation couldn’t survive one grave mistake or serious controversy. Any storm could blow us down. Its survival wouldn’t be simple. Possibly it could never be revived. Like a fine car without gasoline, it would be helpless.”

At Headquarters, though, there had been little enthusiasm for the project. As almost all the 15 Trustees on the board of the Alcoholic Foundation saw it, the Alcoholics Anonymous movement had flourished in the years since the Foundation had been created. They saw no reason to endorse what looked like a radical change.

Finally, though, after Dr. Bob had endorsed the plan, the trustees gave their grudging consent. As Bob P., who years later was general manager of the G.S.O., wrote in his account of the period: “the trustees voted reluctantly to ‘give the Conference a try.’ It was agreed that Conferences would be held on an experimental basis from 1951 through 1954, and that in 1955 the whole concept would be evaluated and a final decision made.”

There were many details to be worked out, including how the Conference was to be funded, how representation from around the U.S. and Canada would be apportioned, how the delegates were to be elected, and how much authority the Conference would have. Bill put all his ideas for how these issues should be handled in a booklet called “The Third Legacy” (later to be expanded into *The A.A. Service Manual*.)

On April 20, 1951, though, 37 delegates from the U.S. and Canada came to New York and spent three days meeting with the 15 trustees, Bill, staff members from G.S.O. and the Grapevine.

For those at Headquarters, this first visit created some anxiety. Dennis Manders, the comptroller of the G.S.O., had this to say: “The feeling was that, wow, here are all these out-of-state examiners coming in, like bank examiners, to see what we are doing.” He goes on to say, though, that “Very quickly it settled into the typical feel of a General Service Conference, even that first one.”

That Conference and the three that followed during this trial period were a vindication of Bill’s original vision that an annual meeting of delegates from A.A. groups could work for the good of Alcoholics Anonymous.

His comments at the closing session of the 1954 Conference, the last of the four trial ones, indicate his great relief and happi-

ness at the success of his plan: “As recently as six or eight years ago, my own confidence in our destiny was terribly shaken. ... The debate was about whether or not we would have a Conference. Back in those days the Traditions had just taken form..., but there still remained this terrific question of how to guarantee our overall function, and how to create a structure that could withstand power drivers and the ravages of time and of adverse circumstances.”

He went on to say: “Today, in this last hour of the time of experiment, I share with you the promise of its certain success and am more moved than at almost any time in my A.A. life. The moment of the transfer of authority to serve, from us old timers to the movement, is at hand.”

## To Our Readers: Send Us Your Archives Stories

The G.S.O. Archives welcomes stories—short or long—of historical interest regarding Alcoholics Anonymous, for publication in *Markings*. Please continue to share your experiences, successes, and historical accounts with us, so that we may pass them on to other readers.



## Markings Now Online-Only

*Markings* has switched to an online-only format. The General Service Office is taking steps to reduce costs by delivering our newsletter electronically. This means *Markings* is no longer being printed and mailed to subscribers.

We encourage readers to have the newsletter delivered to them via e-mail. To register for free e-mail delivery, go to [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) and click on “A.A. Periodicals Digital Subscriptions.” Registration is quick and easy and is available now.

Readers can also read *Markings* on the Archives section of the G.S.O. website. Back issues of the newsletter are also available.

We regret having to take this measure, but the cost of printing and mailing has risen steeply. We want to assure our readers that *Markings* itself will have the same look and continue to cover topics of interest to archivists and others in the A.A. Fellowship.