

NETA

Area 65

**Group Archives Information
and Suggested Guidelines**

(Version 1.0 - 03/02/03)

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References

1. A.A. Guidelines - Archives (MG-17)
2. Archives WORKBOOK (M-441)
3. The A.A. Archives (F-47)

Version History

Version 0.0 Initial changes made based on changes to Area Guidelines
Version 0.1 Changes based on 08/29/02 meeting
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Group Archives Information and Suggested Guidelines

What is this Guide¹

Historical records help us to sift through our day-to-day experience in recovery and reach back for the shared experience from the past. As we sort out the myth from the facts we ensure that our original message of recovery, unity and service remains the same in a changing, growing, expanding Fellowship that constantly renews itself.

Archives are frequently associated with the past but they are also to be linked with true value. We maintain records of permanent value so we can go back and consult the original sources again and again. Like the A.A. program itself, the sections that follow are neither rules nor laws. They are offered as suggestions only. The GSO guidelines are presented as examples - subject to whatever changes may be necessary to best serve the Group.

This document is offered to help Groups that may be planning to set up a Group Archives and/or develop a Group History. One of the most precious and important sources of A.A. history is in the collective experience of our old-timers and Group founders. This document contains suggestions for interviewing Group founders and old-timers to obtain their testimonials and preserve this experience for the benefit of the Fellowship as a whole.

Role of the Group Archivist (or Historian)

An Archivist (or Historian) is the focal point of the Group collection of its historical records. He/she determines what to include in the collection and works towards making the collection available to Group members and others permitted by the Group.

1. The Archivist collects, organizes and preserves materials of historic interest to the Group. The materials gathered are called a "collection".
2. Typically the Archivist selects a representative sample of the collection for arrangement into a display that can be presented at any Group activity. A Group Anniversary is a prime event for an Archives display. It is also a superb opportunity to obtain testimonials from Group founders and old-timers about the history of the Group and the A.A. Fellowship.
3. The Archivist is responsible for the physical and intellectual integrity of the collection. It is important to ensure the privacy and protect the anonymity of members whose names are included in the collected documents.
4. The Archivist should report regularly to the Group about any new material received and give updates about ongoing archival projects. Regular reports should be made to Steering Committee, Group Conscience or Business meetings on Archive matters.

Who Should be Selected as Group Archivist

The selection of the Archivist (or Historian) should be a matter of informed group conscience. Some groups have an Archivist or Historian service position - some depend on volunteers. Past GSRs and Group Secretaries may make good candidates by virtue of their service experience.

¹ Most of the narrative in this guide is extracted from the A.A. publication *Archives Workbook* and is adapted for Group use. Please refer to the *Archives Workbook* for more details.

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Rotation of the Group Archivist

It is the shared experience not to rotate frequently since it usually takes a considerable length of time to get familiar with Archives material and historical documents of record (particularly if the Group has been in existence for some years and has a substantial set of document files). It is recommended that the term for the Archivist be the same as the GSR (2 years).

What to Collect for the Group Archives

An archival collection should take care to not become an unmanageable collection of random odds and ends but be something that provides information and services to the Group. If the Group is bi-lingual the collection should contain items in both languages (e.g. English and Spanish language literature).

Archive items such as Group meeting minutes can be of value if they are chronologically organized and summarized. An example would be a summary history of group conscience decisions extracted from meeting minutes. This summary can provide a wealth of Group history (e.g. when various meetings were started, key Group decisions, etc.).

There are many items of interest in developing a Group Archives collection. The following is a suggestive list of items that might be considered:

1. Minutes of Steering Committee, Group Conscience or Business Meetings.
2. Minutes of Group inventories, service committees and workshops.
3. Group history as donated by individual members.
4. Facility photos.
5. Audio tapes (historical - not speaker meeting tapes).
6. Flyers and other documents for group events (e.g. anniversary, etc.).
7. Early meeting schedules and telephone lists.
8. Grapevine and La Viña articles/letters from Group members who were their authors.
9. Group member donations to A.A. literature.
10. Early A.A. literature (books, pamphlets, etc.).
11. Newspaper articles that mention the Group.

Setting Up a Group Archives Collection²

Archives can be broken down to 3 categories: (1) *historical documents* (and tapes), (2) *artifacts* and (3) *memorabilia* (see page 8 for definitions of these terms). From a practical standpoint, unless the group is willing to make a serious commitment, the collection of artifacts and memorabilia can be difficult:

1. Rare items such as early printings of our literature (e.g. 1st edition Big Books) require special handling and storage to preserve their condition and security.
2. Photographs are a sensitive matter in terms of anonymity. It is recommended that the Group Archives Collection be limited to facility photos and memorial photos of deceased members. (Note: for memorial photos, it is recommended that prior approval be obtained from the deceased member's family).

² Reference *Archives Workbook* - pages 14 and 15

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3. Items such as magazine articles, news clippings and professionally taken photographs have copyright restrictions that should be taken seriously. They should not be photocopied unless prior approval is obtained (i.e. from the publisher or professional photographer - not the author or the subject of the photograph). These items also have anonymity considerations.
4. Donated letters can have special anonymity and privacy concerns depending on the wishes of the donor. Correspondence should not be photocopied.
5. Items in the collection can be classified as (A) Open to all, (B) Open to A.A. members, (C) Open with approval and (D) Closed (at this time).³

A lockable 2, 3 or 4 drawer filing cabinet can make an adequate Group repository if the collection is manageable and does not include valuable or sensitive artifacts and memorabilia. To preserve and protect documents, they should be placed in acid free mylar sheet protectors. This also allows for storage in 3-ring binders without having to punch holes in the documents.

Group Archives Anonymity Considerations

A.A.'s Twelfth Tradition states that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship. In spirit as well as letter, we should protect the anonymity of living and deceased A.A. members. Similar respect should be shown to members of other fellowships that have a spiritual tradition of anonymity (e.g. Al-Anon Family Groups). Group histories should reference members by first name and last initial only.

Group Archives Copyright Considerations

The Archivist should be familiar with current interpretations of copyright regulations pertaining to fair use and privacy (so should the Group service committee to which the Archivist reports).

Since the copyright laws were updated in 1998, it is important to keep abreast of the changes in the law. Perhaps a Group member who has a professional legal or academic background could act as a consultant in these matters.

Ownership of Group Archives Materials⁴

Group Archives belong to the Group - not to an individual. Steps should be taken to avoid confusion as to the ownership of Archives materials. Difficulties can arise when an Archivist rotates or is in personal possession or custody of materials actually belonging to the Group. If the Archivist rotates or, even more problematic, is deceased or incapacitated, family members may not be clear regarding which items were the personal property of the Archivist and which are actually owned by the Group. To avoid both ownership confusion and any potential for public controversy:

1. Group Archive contents should be recorded in a written inventory.
2. The Archivist should prepare and sign a statement, to be appended to the inventory list, clearly indicating that ownership of the property listed in the inventory resides in the Group, and that the property is not the personal property of the Archivist.

³ Reference *Archives Workbook* - pages 30 and 31.

⁴ This is an important consideration - reference *Archives Workbook* - pages 20 and 21

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3. To further avoid confusion as to ownership, it is recommended that the Archives collection not contain items that are “on loan” to the Group.
4. Copies of the statements, with original signatures, should be kept in the Group Secretary files, in the Archives files and with the Archivist’s personal papers.
5. For donations of very special items (e.g. a 1st edition Big Book or rare piece of literature) the Archivist or Group Secretary should acknowledge and record the gift in a manner that makes it clear that the donation is to the Group. It should be done in writing and kept in the Group records.
6. It is recommended that the Group Archives be kept at the Group facility and not be kept at a member’s home. As mentioned previously, an inexpensive, lockable filing cabinet can provide an adequate and secure repository for the Group Archives.

The information that follows illustrates a sample set of documents that can be used by the Group to receive donations to the Archives Collection and maintain an inventory of items in the collection.

As shown on the next following page, the letter of acknowledgment also includes a *Transfer of Gift* (i.e. deed of gift) form. The form is an itemized listing of the donation together with a description of its physical condition and any terms and conditions specified by the donor.

Information from the Transfer of Gift form should be posted to an Archives Inventory Report. The Group Archivist should report regularly to the Group on any new additions to the Archives Collection.

Copies of the letters of acknowledgment, Transfer of Gift forms and inventory reports are a part of the Archives collection itself and should be available for review by any Group member.

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Sample – Letter to Acknowledge Archives Donation

January 1, 2002
[Donor name and address]
Dear _____
This letter acknowledges your donation to the Archives of the _____ Group.
Please know that we are most grateful for your donation and will handle it with loving care. We are sure you understand that this is a permanent donation and that you are confident we will make the best possible use of it.
This letter also acknowledges that your donation is a gift to the _____ Group and not to me personally.
Thank you again for your loving generosity.
(Signed)
Archivist, _____ Group [Archivist name and address]

Sample – Archives Transfer of Gift Form

<p>Donor: [Donor name].</p> <p>Items Donated:</p> <p>[List item(s) donated].</p> <p>Received By: [Group Archivist].</p> <p>Physical Condition: [Describe the physical condition of the donated item(s)].</p> <p>Statement of Terms and Conditions of the Conveyance of the Gift</p> <p>[State whether any access restrictions are specified].</p> <hr/>
<p>The undersigned certifies that _____, the donor, is the lawful owner of all rights and title of the property described above. By this document a gift of all rights and title of the items listed above is conveyed to the _____ Group of Alcoholics Anonymous.</p> <p>Signature: _____ Date: _____</p>

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Sample – Archives Inventory Report

Archives Inventory date: January 2, 2002.

Archives location: Filing cabinet in the XYZ Group

Archives Collection Contents:

Copy of registration form sent to GSO to register the Group.

Binders containing meeting minutes from Steering Committee and Business Meetings.

Binder containing minutes from Group inventories.

Written Group history [date written].

Assortment of Group flyers for events and workshops.

Assortment of 12 early A.A. pamphlets.

Assortment of meeting directories made by the Group Secretary.

Copies of Box 459 publications sent to the Group by GSO.

Audio-tapes from Group Anniversary events - Group history speakers.

Photo's of Group facility.

Early Group phone lists.

Etc.

Special Items:

2nd edition Big Book (12th printing).

4th edition Big Book (1st printing sent to Group by GSO)

Notes:

The inventory list above is an example for illustration. Groups may wish to show the inventory in more detail. This is a matter of informed group conscience.

Items containing full names of members should be limited to review by A.A. members only.

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Oral History Collecting Guidelines (Testimonials)

Our old-timers (sometimes also called early-timers) have a collective and fondly treasured experience that is important to preserve for current and future members of the A.A. Fellowship.

The Archives of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous is encouraging efforts to collect and preserve this experience in the form of written and/or audio taped testimonials.

Each Group is encouraged to obtain testimonials from its old-timer members. It is important to note that this type of testimonial is not in the form of traditional speaker meeting tapes. The testimonials are meant to collect and preserve the member's recollections of the history of A.A.

To get started, make meeting announcements about seeking such material. It may also be helpful to set up a team of volunteer helpers to record the oral histories.

Before taping, explain that primary interest is in A.A.'s role in the story. The emphasis is on sobriety, rather than drinking and the formation of A.A. (not just necessarily a specific Group).

1. Begin the tape by identifying yourself and providing the date of the taping.
2. Then introduce the member.
3. Perhaps the member can begin the story with his/her initial contact with the A.A. program.
4. Some of the following questions can assist in guiding the interview:
 - a. When and where was the first A.A. contact made?
 - b. How did he/she learn about A.A.?
 - c. How many groups or meetings were in existence?
 - d. What individuals were especially prominent in his/her sobriety?
 - e. What kind of Twelfth Step work was going on?
 - f. Did he/she have any contact with G.S.O. or an Intergroup Central Office?
 - g. What special occasions do he/she recall (assemblies, opening central offices, etc.)?
 - h. What service structure existed and what service positions did he/she hold?
 - i. What, if any, Traditions issues existed?
 - j. What types of problems, if any, were groups having with "alcoholic/addicts"?
 - k. How many bi-lingual Groups existed?

Group Archives Information and Suggested Guidelines

Compiling and Writing a Group History

Try to obtain historical material and information about the Group since its inception from early members. Do not forget about non-alcoholics who were helpful in the early years. The collective experience of Group founders and old-timers is a valued resource of information to preserve and share with the Group and the A.A. Fellowship:

1. A Group Anniversary event is a good opportunity to both compile and record historical Group information. This can be accomplished by having Group History speaker(s) at the event and taping their talks.
2. Another method would be to have a round-table sharing on the Group's origin and growth by founders and early members of the Group and taping these discussions.
3. A Founders Day Event is yet another opportunity to collect historical testimonial information.

Taped talks and discussions can be transcribed to provide a foundation upon which to define the origin and growth of the Group. The following is a recommended approach for compiling and writing a Group History:

1. Contact early Group members and ask to tape them for a recorded history of the Group. Give them a copy of the questions that are planned to be asked so that they may prepare themselves for the interview (see item 4 below).
2. Begin the taping by identifying yourself and providing the date of the taping.
3. Then introduce the member to be interviewed.
4. Some questions that can be asked:
 - a. What is his/her sobriety date?
 - b. What Group(s) did he/she attend prior to starting up the Group?
 - c. What caused the group to get started?
 - d. What individuals were especially prominent in helping to get the Group started?
 - e. What other Groups helped in getting things started?
 - f. What kind of Twelfth Step work did the Group do?
 - g. What was the service structure in the Group?
 - h. What special occasions does he/she recall?
 - i. What does he/she recall about early members who are deceased?
 - j. What Group relationship exists with Al-Anon Family Groups (startup and today)?
 - k. Has the Group come of age?
5. Summarize the oral histories into a short Group history (a word processing document if possible). Have the members interviewed look over a draft to offer editing changes. Update the history based on their comments.
6. Submit the history to informed group conscience vote for acceptance. It would be helpful to have the members interviewed present at the meeting to comment upon the history.
7. Please forward a copy of the history through your GSR (your Group mail contact) to the NETA Archives. If you can forward it on a diskette, in one of the more popular word processor formats or as a simple text file ("*.txt"), it would be much appreciated. Otherwise just forward the written history to the Area, District and GSO archives for preservation.

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Thoughts About a Written Group History (as influenced by the Traditions)

1. A written Group history should encourage unity. Each Group member is an important contributor to the whole.
2. The principle of *informed group conscience* should prevail. Histories should be documented, collected and preserved with full participation and disclosure of minority viewpoints and due respect to each member's contribution.
3. Inclusiveness is strongly encouraged. When multiple members can contribute to a Group history they should all be invited to do so rather than placing sole reliance on one member's recollections.
4. With respect to developing histories, each Group is responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when the history involves others, no action should be taken that would do harm. "Restraint of pen and tongue" and "Rule 62" should be spiritual guidelines.
5. The sole purpose of a Group history is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.
6. No Group history should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues - particularly those of politics, alcohol reform or sectarian religion. Concerning such matters they should express no views whatever.
7. A Group history should use only first names and last initials in referencing members of A.A. (living and deceased). Similar respect should be shown to non-alcoholics who embrace the spiritual tradition of anonymity (e.g. Al-Anon Family Group members). If last names are included then the document should be marked as "confidential for A.A. members only".
8. A.A. anonymity Traditions should be strictly practiced. Private correspondence, copyrighted materials and professionally taken photographs should not be photocopied without prior consent. Ideally, due to anonymity concerns, photographs should be limited to facility photos and memorial photos of deceased members (for memorial photos, prior approval should be obtained from the deceased member's family).

Group Archives Information and Suggested Guidelines

Summary of References, Terms/Definitions and Collection Guidelines

References

PUBLICATION	CONTENT
A.A. Guidelines - Archives	A.A. publication MG-17 - overview information.
Archives WORKBOOK	A.A. publication M-44I - rich in details.
The A.A. Archives	A.A. publication F-47 - overview.

Terms/Definitions

WORD	MEANING
History	Provable fact-based reporting
Editorials	Individual opinion that cannot be proved or disproved
Documents	Any type of A.A. publication or written materials (e.g. minutes, newsletters, reports, letters and correspondence, flyers, brochures, etc. - does not have to be Conference approved).
Artifacts	Documents, magazine and newspaper articles
Odds and ends	Documents and items having little or no historical importance
Memorabilia	A.A. related correspondence and photographs
Testimonial	Personal account of experiences
Myth	Fiction based on imagination or belief
Repository	Library of historical papers, artifacts and memorabilia

Collection Guidelines

INCLUDE	EXCLUDE
History	Editorials or information that cannot be verified
Artifacts	Odds and ends
Memorabilia	Curios and throw-away items
Testimonials	Myths and second-hand reports
Repository (library)	Making it a storage area for anything and everything

Donations to the NETA Archives Collection

The items listed below would be most gratefully welcome as donations for preservation in the NETA Archives

Guidelines	Groups & Members	NETA	Delegates & Trustees	Central Offices
Please Donate	Group history * Facility photos Founder testimonials of Group history * Old-timer testimonials of A.A. history * Early literature (books and pamphlets) News clippings and magazine articles about the Group	Area history * Area Assembly minutes Area Committee minutes Area Newsletters District Committee minutes District Histories Documents and correspondence of historical importance Important documents for permanent retention Copy of Registrar data base of Groups and Trusted Servants Assembly, Convention and Workshop flyers Service Committee history and testimonials *	Testimonials * Documents and correspondence of historical importance Service diaries Documents related to service experience 1 st printings of new A.A. literature (as well as galley proofs and review copies) Board, Conference and Regional Forum documents and memorabilia Special Assembly memorabilia	Office history * Office Mgr. and Steering Committee testimonials * Newsletters News clippings Magazine articles Group Histories * Facility photos Documents and correspondence of historical importance Early literature (books and pamphlets) Early directories

* Note: histories and testimonials can be written or audio taped. Word processing formats are also welcome (diskette or CD).