

General Service Committee of Eastern Massachusetts, Area 30  
P.O. Box 51411 Boston, MA 02205-1411  
[www.aemass.org](http://www.aemass.org)

**Archives Committee**  
**Written Group History Workshop**

**Our Group History**

“Whenever a society or civilization perishes there is always one condition present:  
they forgot where they came from...” – Carl Sandburg

## **Group History Workshop**

### **Eastern Massachusetts, Area 30 Archives Committee**

Website: [www.aaemass.org](http://www.aaemass.org)

Email: [archives@aaemass.org](mailto:archives@aaemass.org)

**Statement of Purpose:** The Eastern Massachusetts General Service Archives Committee collects, preserves, and presents materials of historical interest to Alcoholics Anonymous.

#### **General Introduction**

The Archives: its function and resources. Interview, collect, preserve, transcribe, catalog events. District Archives Representatives, Group Archives Representatives. General Service Office (GSO) Archives.

**Meeting place:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m., 80 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown at St. John's Church. All AA members are welcome to attend.

#### **Group Histories**

The Eastern Massachusetts General Service Archives Committee continues to compile the history of groups in our area. To submit a copy of your group's history for our files, please send completed form to:

General Service Committee  
PO Box 51411  
Boston, MA 02205-1411  
Attention: Area 30 Archives

#### **Equipment**

Several tape recorders and a transcribing machine may be borrowed from the Archives Committee. Please make your request at the monthly Committee meeting, or send it via email to [archives@aaemass.org](mailto:archives@aaemass.org).

#### **Our Displays Carry the Message, too!**

A multi-panel traveling exhibit depicting the comprehensive history of AA both nationally and in Eastern Massachusetts may be borrowed from the Archives Committee for anniversaries, special events, district meetings, etc. The display includes photos of Bill W, Dr. Bob, Dr. Silkworth, early assemblies, and Akron & Boston settings; reproductions of newspaper & magazine articles, and reproductions of correspondence. Further, Archives Committee members are available to share information about our work at your event. Please come to the monthly meeting or contact us via email at [archives@aaemass.org](mailto:archives@aaemass.org), and your request will be added to the commitment calendar.

#### **Resources for Group Histories and District Histories**

Beginning the process: Working alone or involving other AA members; Getting support and information (sources: business meetings, secretary's report announcements; archives' member's presentations, district meetings, old- or long-timer's meetings, anniversaries, conventions, alkathons, newsletters, websites...)

#### **The Long-timer Interview Process**

Logistical Explanation and Questions from the 54th General Service Conference

#### **Group Histories: Resources**

##### **Examples of Group Histories**

The Area 30 Archives has several examples of group histories in its collection which are accessible by request to the committee. Generally, a committee member who is familiar with the collection and can assist you with your

research will accompany you on your first visit to the archives. Samples of local group histories and a district-wide history published by the Central Ohio Fellowship Group are available for reference.

### Other Resources

- The Archives Workbook (M-44i) is available online at [http://aa.org/en\\_gso\\_archives.cfm?PageID=23](http://aa.org/en_gso_archives.cfm?PageID=23) and may be requested from GSO at [archives@aa.org](mailto:archives@aa.org). Orders may also be made from the Literature Order Form. The “Oral Histories Kit” is also available at the above link in .PDF form. The Archives Committee retains copies for those without computers.
- *Markings: Your Archives Interchange* Vol XXII, No. 2 2002. This particular issue contains questions for group history & long-timer interview sessions. It also provides examples of group histories from Garden Grove, CA and Manhattan, NY. The Markings newsletter seeks local group history stories for publication and is available through GSO Archives. Some issues are available at the following link: [http://aa.org/en\\_gso\\_archives.cfm?PageID=24](http://aa.org/en_gso_archives.cfm?PageID=24) . Please contact the Area 30 Archives Committee for further information.
- The Group History Workshop document may be downloaded & printed from the Area 30 web site: [www.aamass.org/areadocs](http://www.aamass.org/areadocs).

### Guidelines and Suggestions for Writing a Group History

*These guidelines and questions were compiled from Eastern Massachusetts Archives Committee materials and other materials received from National Archives Workshops attended by Area 30 Archives Committee members in 2002 and 2003.*

Compiling and writing your group’s history is an exciting and rewarding experience. The process can help you gain a better understanding of what past members went through to establish and maintain your group, how each group is autonomous and yet how each group is a vital part of the whole Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

One way to approach writing your group’s history is to view the process as one in which you are “telling the group’s story” much like a story in the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* that provides details about early AA. Do not be overly concerned about form; the most important thing is to get the information down on paper, or even on tape, to capture the flavor of the times and events. The information-gathering process provides all that is needed for the history.

As you and your Fellows interview old-timers, verify contradictory facts, listen to funny stories, and hear the Traditions at work within the group, the group’s story will start to “tell itself.” The questions you have been asking will easily provide ideas on how to organize the written history.

As your work continues, the group’s history grows from a compilation of descriptive data to a narrative story reflecting the group’s experience, strength, and hope. You will be part of the process of “passing it on.”

The first step in compiling a history will be to talk to the old-timers in the group. With their help, you can create a list of names of the earliest group members, or their spouses, who may be available for an interview. Since some of these earlier members may no longer attend the group’s meetings, or may have moved to other

nearby communities, no source of information should be overlooked. Be sure to note all names and resources as you work, for you may need to interview several members in your search.

Ideas for gathering information about your group could include a special meeting of old-timers either at the group level or with several other groups at the district level. You may want to consider a series of interviews starting at your group's annual founding day anniversary and continue meeting monthly until the group's history is completed. Some groups have asked an old-timer for an interview at the time of his or her anniversary and begin to compile their group history information in this way. Remember, each person has his own perspective. We welcome all points of view in AA.

Another idea is to begin the process by gathering group members on or around AA Founders' Day in June. Akathons, Roundups, local Assemblies, or State Conventions are other opportunities at which to meet and interview group members and to encourage them to continue the efforts.

Consider taping the meetings, particularly if a group is assembled. Note-taking can be difficult and distracting and is not advised when more than one person is responding to a question.

If you are interviewing one-on-one, one group member can take notes while the other asks questions, provided no interruptions are made. If you decide to tape your meetings, remember the Archives can provide transcription equipment to help when transcribing interviews. These interviews, in addition to providing information about your group's history, are also part of a long-timer's story, so be sure to keep copies of any tapes you make, and label their contents.

Once you begin to write the group's history based on these early old-timer's meeting (or meetings), you will begin to detect gaps in the group's story and can therefore identify unanswered questions. The enclosed handout of suggested questions will help in the process. Continue to contact and talk with the old-timers on a one-to-one basis.

*Remember that while these questions are suggestions only, information included on the first page is critical to your research, and will provide the basis for your story.*

One suggestion regarding anonymity is to use first and last names on the cover "contact" sheet that will be used as a primary resource. This will be of particular assistance if, for example, there are two or more people with the same first name and last initial. However, consider using first names and last initials only for any draft of the history you distribute for review and correction. This will preserve anonymity for group members.

Please note that both Area 30 and GSO Archives require an anonymity agreement from researchers or anyone else using the collection, thereby respecting AA's Tradition of anonymity.

When the history is nearly complete, share it with the old-timers and other group members. Remember that the group's history is a shared history, and those who review it now will be essential in filling in missing

information *Use as much paper as necessary* to incorporate all the information offered. Keep the process going and consider again seeking help and support for review and distribution by announcing your request for draft reviews in your group's secretary report, at the district's meetings, at old timer's and long-timer's meetings, at alkathons, roundups, and other gatherings.

When your group history is considered complete, make a copy for your group, a copy for your District Archivist (or DCM if you do not have a District Archivist), and mail the original to the Area 30 Archives at the following address:

**General Service Committee  
Archives Committee  
P.O. Box 51411, Boston, MA 02205-1411**

\* Copies of this form may be downloaded and printed from the Area 30 website: [www.aemass.org/areadocs](http://www.aemass.org/areadocs).

And so, we begin....

**Declaration of Unity\***

This we own to AA's future:  
To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our fellowship united.  
For on AA unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.

\* (Copyright AA World Service)

**Responsibility Pledge\***

'I am responsible...  
When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help,  
I want the hand of AA always  
to be there.  
And for that, I am responsible."

**Serenity Prayer**

God, grant me the serenity,  
To accept the things I cannot change  
The courage to change the things that I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

**Our Group History** (Use back of sheet for additional information)

Name of group \_\_\_\_\_

Date founded \_\_\_\_\_ District and Group Number \_\_\_\_\_

Day(s) of Meeting \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Time \_\_\_\_\_ Previous name \_\_\_\_\_

**FOUNDER(S)** (Continue on reverse side with additional names.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Sobriety Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sobriety Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NAMES of EARLY MEMBERS** (Use back of this page for additional early members.)

- Do any of the original members of the Group still attend meetings at the group? Please indicate.

**CURRENT NUMBER OF MEMBERS** \_\_\_\_\_

- When and why was the Group first formed and where did it meet?

- Has the Group Moved? Or was there any change in Meeting Location, Day or Time?
  
- Were there any splits in the Group; or, was the Group a “spin off” or a “split” from another group? If so, what new group or groups were formed?
  
- What was the original meeting format? (Open, Speaker, Step, etc.) Has it changed? Y\_\_N\_\_.  
Has the Group added to the original format through book study, literature study, beginner’s meetings, beginner’s literature tables, or Grapevine meetings? If so, please explain.
  
- Has the Group kept the original name? Y\_\_N\_\_ If not, why did it change and to what new name?
  
- Have there been disagreements within the Group? ▪ How have the Traditions been practiced in the Group to resolve disagreements? Was the Group able to do a group inventory? How does the Group utilize a group conscience?
  
- What about the Group’s service history? Have there been General Service Representatives (GSRs) elected? Does the Group practice Rotation of officers? Has the Group participated in Service work at the District Level (District Committee Members, etc.)?
  
- Any Grapevine articles submitted or published? If so, do you have a copy available?
  
- What is the Group’s relationship with Central Service?
  
- After Group expenses, what is your informed group conscience for distribution of excess funds?
  
- Has the Group been involved in any outside activities as a group? Social events? Service outreaches such as Public Information, Prison Commitments, or other Twelfth Step work?

- Does the Group give out chips and if so, what style? Does the Group celebrate its members' sobriety anniversaries? Does the Group celebrate on the anniversary date or at a special monthly meeting?
  
- Does the Group have any particularly close relationship with another group in the District? Have they co-sponsored events together? Please describe.
  
- Are there any other things or events in the Group's history which are particularly interesting? Has the group ever been involved in any unusual projects?
  
- Does the Group have any new plans for the future?
  
- If the Group is no longer active, when and why did it fold?

Prepared by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please send completed form to:

**General Service Committee, Archives**  
**P.O. Box 51411**  
**Boston, MA 02205-1411**

Or, come to our meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday, 7:30pm., 80 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown (St. John's Church).  
All are welcome!

*We encourage you to gather information from as many people in the Group who wish to participate and we celebrate that each of us has our own point of view. Please feel free to use additional sheets of paper to complete your Group History!*