

GUIDE TO THE STEPPING STONES ARCHIVE

The Stepping Stones Foundation
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Descriptive Summary

Creators: William Griffith Wilson, Lois Burnham Wilson, Stepping Stones Foundation

Title: The Stepping Stones Foundation Archives

Dates: 1847-2003 (bulk 1913-1988)

Provenance: Lois Wilson entrusted this collection to the Stepping Stones Foundation

Quantity: 160 Linear feet [@ 200 boxes]

Abstract: The Stepping Stones Archives primarily document the lives of Bill and Lois Wilson from their courtship through her death in 1988, through family, personal and business correspondence, property, household, military, educational, financial and medical records, diaries, travel logs, writings, public addresses, photographs and memorabilia. Additional materials, both original and photocopied, document the creation and organization of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Al-Anon Family Groups. Other materials include the institutional records of the Stepping Stones Foundation, miscellaneous keepsakes and other memorabilia, and extensive collection of photographs of family and friends, audio and video recordings, and a collection of early editions of titles published by the Alcoholic Foundation and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Biographical & Historical Note

William Griffith (Bill) Wilson (1895-1971) was born in East Dorset, Vermont, the son of Gilman Barrows (Gilly) Wilson (1870-1954) and Emily Griffith (1870-1961). His paternal grandparents were William Wilson and Helen Elizabeth Barrows. His maternal grandparents were Gardner Fayette (Jolly) Griffith and Ella Brock. Bill had a sister, Dorothy and a half-sister Helen, the daughter of Gilman and his second wife, Christine. He attended Burr and Burton Seminary in Manchester, Vermont and Norwich University, a military college, in Northfield, Vermont. During World War I, while still at Norwich, he joined the Coast Artillery Corps, and received additional training at Plattsburg, New York, Fort Monroe in Virginia, and Fort Rodman in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

On January 24, 1918, Bill Wilson marries Lois Burnham (1891-1988) of Brooklyn Heights, New York, the daughter of Clark Burnham (1855-1936) and Matilda Hoyt Spelman (1864-1930). Her paternal grandparents were Nathan Clark Burnham and Mary Arrison Pancoast. Her maternal grandparents were William Chapman Spelman and Sarah Hoyt. Lois had three sisters – Matilda, who died in infancy, Barbara, and Katherine (Kitty), and two brothers – Rogers and Lyman. In Brooklyn Lois attended the Quaker Friends School and graduated from the packer Collegiate Institute. She rose through the ranks at Brooklyn's YWCA, assisted at a school, then worked as an occupational therapist after Bill shipped out to England in August 1918.

As a young military officer awaiting overseas assignment at Fort Rodman, Bill took his first drink, and then gradually began a long descent into chronic and desperate alcoholism. By 1934, when Bill's condition appeared hopeless to all around him, he received an unexpected visit from a miraculously sober old drinking buddy. This visit set in motion a series of events that led to Bill's sobriety and his collaboration with Robert H. Smith (Dr. Bob) in co-founding a program in 1935 for helping other alcoholics – Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). From the beginning Lois participated actively in Bill's AA work and supported the wives and families of alcoholics. In 1951, she and Anne Bingham co-founded the Al-Anon Family Groups. During the second half of the twentieth century, AA and Al-Anon grew into vast networks of local groups and inspired other twelve-step programs for addressing a variety of life problems. For additional biographical information on Bill and Lois see the Stepping Stones website: www.stepsstones.org.

Stepping Stones is the name Bill and Lois Wilson gave their home in Bedford Hills, New York, where they lived from 1941 until his death in 1971 and hers in 1988. After moving fifty-two times in a two-year period, the Wilsons acquired this 1920-vintage summerhouse through generous payment terms from Helen Griffith, the widow of an alcoholic and a friend of an AA member who knew the Wilsons. The Stepping Stones Foundation, a non-profit organization created by Lois in 1979, continues the Wilson' tradition of opening the house and grounds to friends and visitors from all over the world. The house is now a museum filled with photographs, memorabilia, books and furnishings that document the beginnings and dynamic growth of the worldwide movements of AA and Al-Anon. Because very little has been changed since in the house since the Wilsons last lived there, it retains an authentic and homey feel. In addition to the main house, which was built in 1920, two other buildings stand on the wooded hillside: Bill's studio, sometimes called Wit's End, and the Caretaker's House, which Lois had built in 1984. The Archives are located on the ground floor of the Caretaker's House. For more information about the work and mission of the Stepping Stones Foundation see www.steppingstones.org.

Scope & Content Note

The Stepping Stones Archives primarily document the lives of Bill and Lois Wilson from their courtship through her death in 1988, through family, personal and business correspondence, property, household, military, educational, financial and medical records, diaries, travel logs, writings, public addresses, photographs and memorabilia. The collection also contains items related to the Wilson, Griffith, Burnham and Spelman families. Additional materials, both original and photocopied, document the creation and organization of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Al-Anon Family Groups. Documents relating to the history, fiscal management, programs and activities of the Stepping Stones Foundation form a discrete record group. Additional materials include miscellaneous keepsakes and other memorabilia, an extensive collection of photographs of family and friends [most labeled], audio recordings on both reel-to-reel tapes and cassettes, film and video recordings, and a collection of early editions of titles published by the Alcoholic Foundation and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Large correspondence series for both Bill and Lois include: (1) letters written back and forth during their courtship, World War I separations, the alcoholic years, and the early years of sobriety; (2) letters written to and from family members and friends; (3) letters related to official AA and Al-Anon business; and (4) messages of gratitude, appreciation, sympathy from members of AA and Al-Anon worldwide. The larger series of writings include drafts of published works and public alcoholism, nutrition, medical research, company research, stock analyses, and psychic/spiritual experiences. Almost twice the size of Bill's collection, Lois' subject file topics reflect both Bill's interests and her own wide-ranging interests, her careful household management, and her late-life support of two foreign "foster children."

Arrangement

The collection is organized into ten record groups as outlined below. See the Container List and Folder Descriptions section on page _____ for more detailed listings.

1. **William Griffith Wilson (WGW) [46 boxes]**
 - 101 Biographical
 - 102 Correspondence
 - 103 Writings
 - 104 Media - Print
 - 105 Media - Electronic
 - 106 Photographs
 - 107 Talks & Public Appearances
 - 108 Awards and Tributes
 - 109 Foundations
 - 110 Subject Files

2. **Lois Burnham Wilson (LBW) [54 boxes]**
 - 201 Biographical
 - 202 Correspondence
 - 203 Writings
 - 204 Media – Print
 - 205 Media – Electronic
 - 206 Talks & Public Appearances
 - 207 Awards & Tributes
 - 208 Subject Files

3. **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) [38 Boxes]**
 - 300s Personages
 - 400s History & Events
 - 500s Publications
 - 600s General Service Board/Office
 - 700s Conventions & Meetings

4. **Al-Anon Family Groups (AL-AN) [19] boxes**
 - 800s History, Organization, Administration, Publications, Conventions

5. **Stepping Stones Foundation (SSF) [10 boxes]**
 - 900s History, Correspondence, Financial, Board of Trustees, Programs, Property

6. **Photographs (PHOTOS) [16 boxes]**
 - 106 PHOTOS/WGW
 - 107 PHOTOS/LBW

7. **Memorabilia [8 boxes]**
8. **Audio Recordings [boxes]**
9. **Film/Video recordings [boxes]**
10. **Books [boxes]**

Administrative Policies

Required Forms: Research Request; Access Agreement; Use Agreement

The Stepping Stones Foundation Archives are open to interested researchers by appointment only. Access to all materials is at the discretion of the staff. Requests for access to the collection will be considered upon receipt of a completed research Request Form, which identifies the purpose of the research, the affiliation of the researcher, the objectives and intended products of the research. This form may be obtained by phone, fax or e-mail request to the addresses listed on page one. Upon arrival at the Archives the researcher will be asked to sign an Access Agreement and a Use Agreement.

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“[Document] [Photo] property of the Stepping Stones Foundation. No permission is granted for any use or reproduction whatsoever.” (re: Cousins counsel of 2005)

Related Collections

The archival collections of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon contain some duplicates of material at Stepping Stones, especially for the early years of the organization. These two archives will have a more complete record of their respective organization’s on-going history than will Stepping Stones’. The contact information for AA is General Service Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115 and archives@aa.org; for Al-Anon it is Al-Anon/Alateen, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617 and WSO@al-anon.org

Container List and Folder Descriptions

The folder descriptions in the container list below are each limited to two lines and will introduce researchers to the collections. More detailed descriptions are available in a comprehensive Master Finding Aid at the Stepping Stones Archives

[pages 6-182 will follow with container list]

THE STEPPING STONES FOUNDATION ARCHIVES

RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

Date: _____

Name: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City

State

Zip

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-Mail _____

Please describe briefly the intended subject area of your research/interest:

Please check the intended purpose(s) of your research:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Television Program | <input type="checkbox"/> Book | <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Identification |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Program | <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine/News Article | <input type="checkbox"/> AA/Al-Anon Archives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Dissertation/Thesis | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Interest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary | <input type="checkbox"/> Research Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Other [explain below] |

Before handling any materials from the Archives you will be asked to sign both an Access Agreement Form and a Use Agreement Form.

Send completed form to:

Executive Director
The Stepping Stones Foundation
P.O. Box 452
Bedford Hills, NY 10507

Phone: 914-232-4822
Fax: 914-232-2580
E-mail: info@steppingstones.org
Website: www.steppingstones.org

THE STEPPING STONES FOUNDATION ARCHIVES

RIGHTS & REPRODUCTION APPLICATION

Date: _____

Name: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City

State

Zip

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-Mail _____

Name of Publication/Program/etc.: _____

Publisher/Manufacturer: _____

Estimated production run: _____

Number of reproduction(s) requested in: Black/White _____ Color: _____

We agree to pay the following: Use fee(s): _____ Photographic fee(s): _____

Credit Line: *The Stepping Stones Foundation Archives*

Applicant's Signature

date

On behalf of publisher/producer

date

On behalf of The Stepping Stones Foundation

date