

# Adventist archival and manuscript collections



Brief history, current state,  
and future prospects

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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

# History



Records administration at the  
General Conference

# From Statistical Office to ASTR



∞ 1904: position of GC Statistical Secretary established

THE  
ROGERS COMPENDIUM  
OF THE  
GRAHAM SYSTEM OF SHORTHAND

A PRACTICAL, SYNTHETIC METHOD

*Being a Concise Presentation of Reporting-Style Principles, and an  
Epitome of the Principles of Phrasing and Abbreviation  
Exemplified throughout the Entire Series of  
Publications and Literature Devoted  
to Standard Phonography*

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BY  
H. EDSON ROGERS

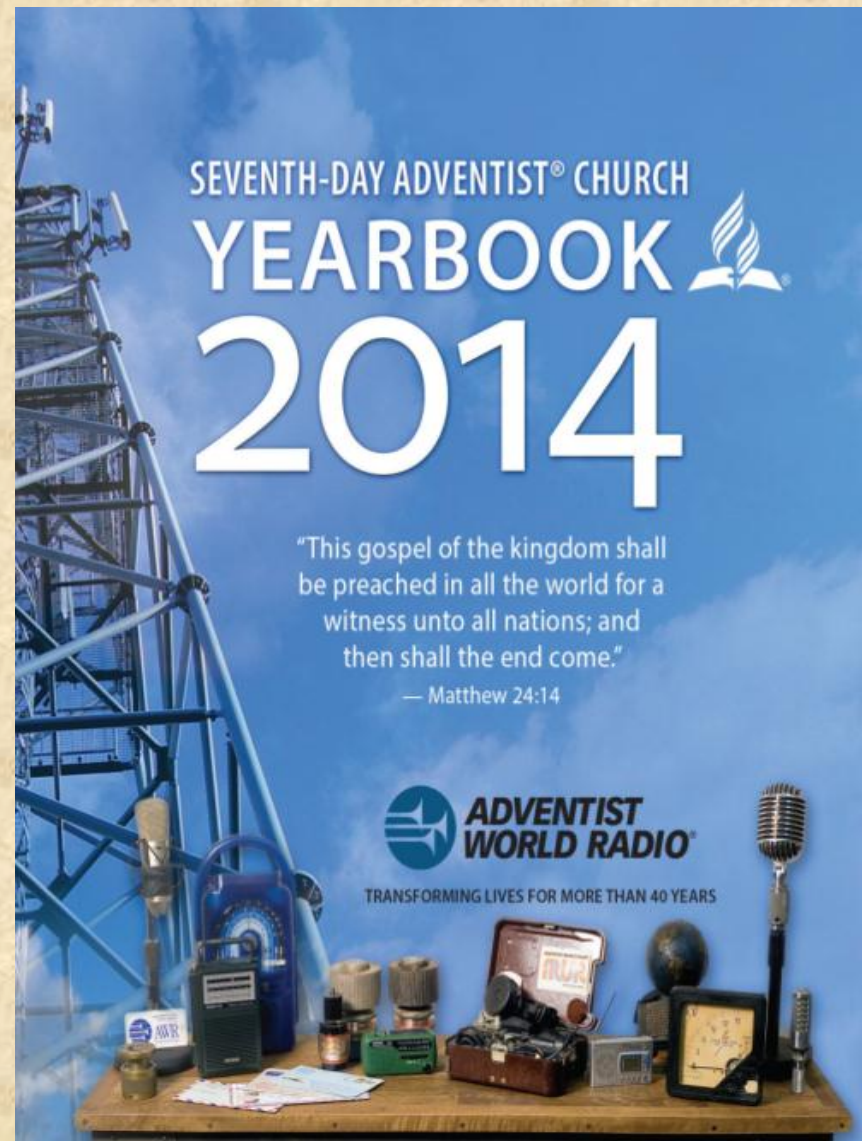
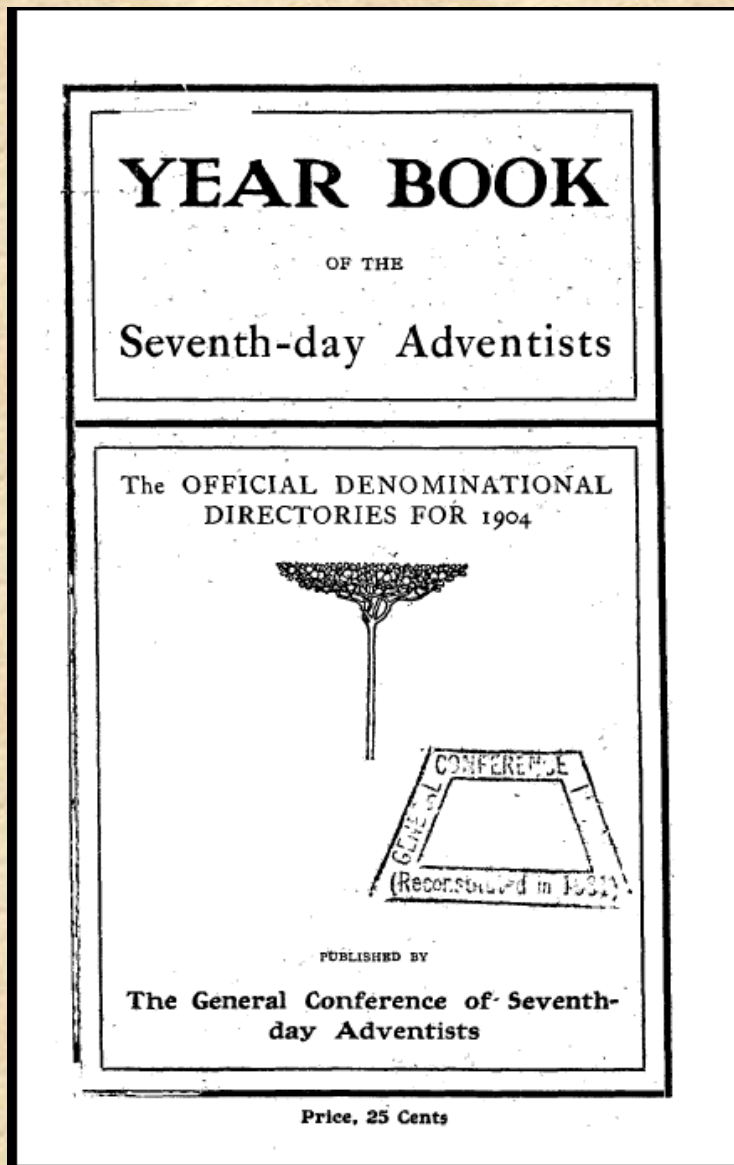
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FOURTH EDITION, REVISED

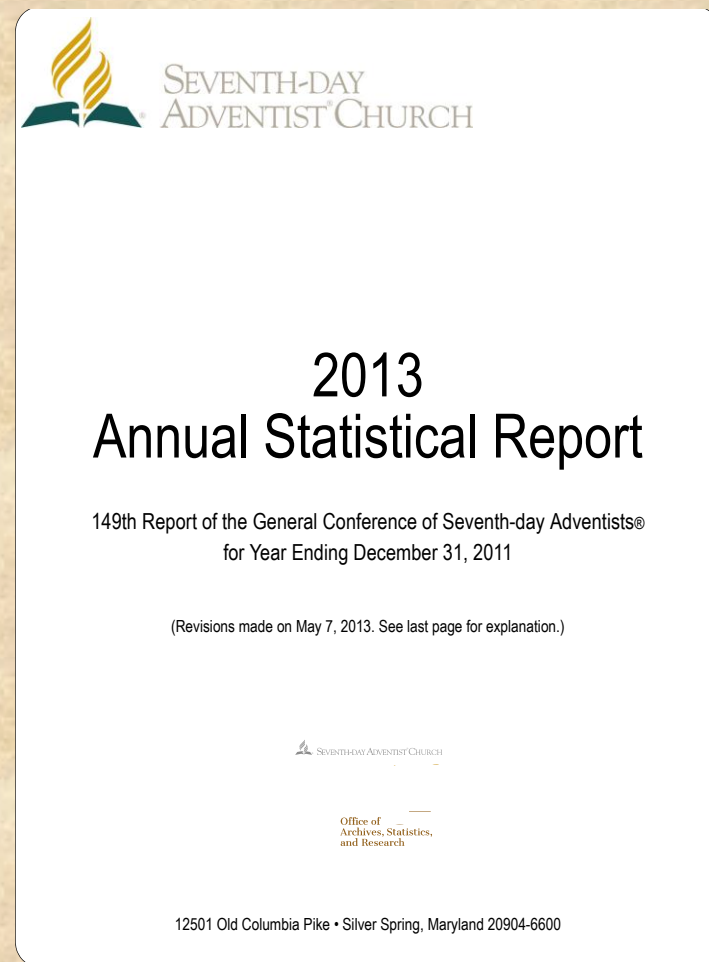
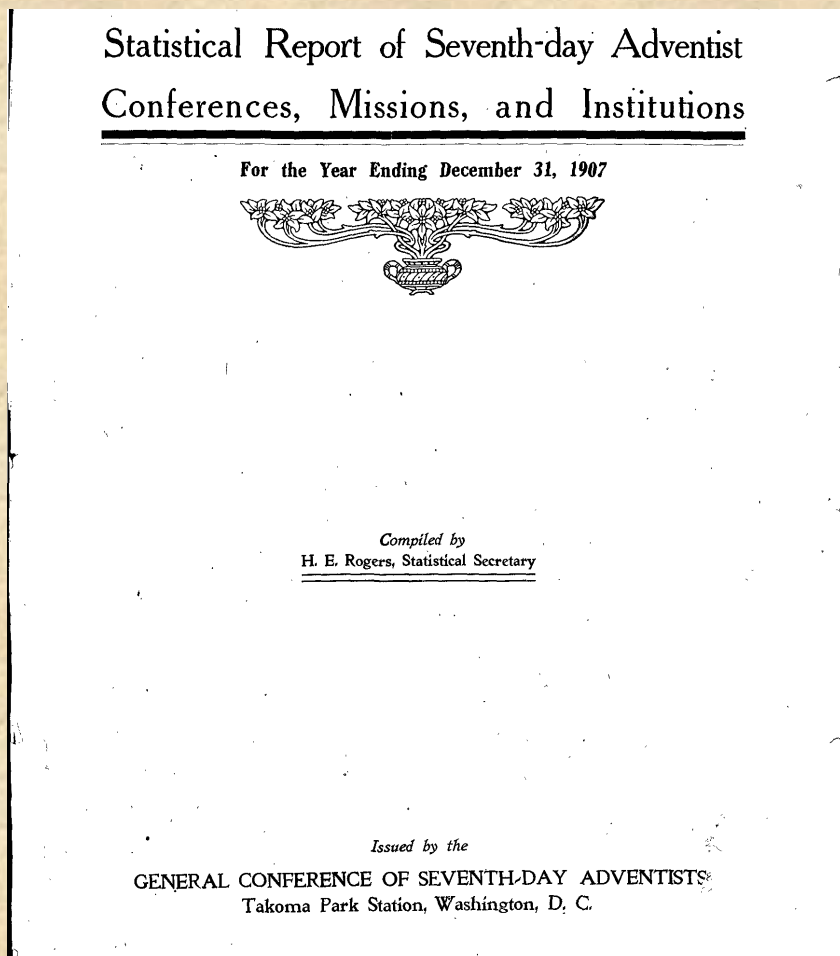
THE HAMMOND PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,  
LANSING, MICHIGAN  
1905

Rogers's 1905 book

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook:*  
published 1883–1894; 1904–present



# *Annual Statistical Report* – published as a stand-alone report since 1907





# Harvey E. Rogers

Photo from 1901

First Statistical  
Secretary of  
the General  
Conference,  
1904-41

# From Statistical Office to ASTR



- ∞ 1904: position of GC Statistical Secretary established
- ∞ 1940s: Statistical Office responsible for some management of GC records



## Claude Conard

Statistical Secretary, 1941-50

In the late 1940s, Conard and his staff prepared a number of “card files & lists” of materials that were held “in the vaults of the Statistical Office”.

From these Conard prepared a “Survey and Record” of all the materials, completed February 12, 1950: the first listing of GC records.





## E. D. Dick

Wrote to the GC Officers in Sept. 1955 “to suggest that in planning for denominational archives they be planned for in the new Seminary building.”

However, “a number of questions were raised”; “It was Agreed, To hold the matter in abeyance.”

Nothing more was done until the 1970s.

# From Statistical Office to ASTR



- 1904: position of GC Statistical Secretary established
- 1940s: Statistical Office responsible for some management of GC records
- 1973: General Conference Archives founded

# Steps towards GC Archives



- ☞ May 1971, GC Officers: “The whole subject of General Conference archives and archivists is **now under study**”
- ☞ Sept. 1971, GC Officers receive a report from “Special Items Committee [which] recommended that the GC Executive Committee give favorable consideration to the employment of an archivist at headquarters to organize and care for church historical documents in possession of the General Conference” – but Officers refer back to the Special Items Committee.

# Steps towards GC Archives



❧ January 1973 GC Officers receive another report from the “Special Items Committee”, asked to “give study to the subject of headquarters archives material and the need for an archivist at headquarters.”

❧ But its recommendation is to set up another committee!

❧ The Officers appointed an *ad hoc* “Archives-Archivist Committee”, chaired by W. J. Hackett, a general vice president, with four other members: GC Secretary C. O. Franz, Baasch, Undertreasurer M. E. Kemmerer, and White Estate Secretary Arthur L. White.

# Steps towards GC Archives



- ∞ January 1973:
- ∞ That membership signaled that the committee's real role was to decide what an archivist's responsibilities would be, and to identify how to fund an archivist & who should be appointed to the sensitive post.
- ∞ Arthur White's involvement leads me to deduce that he *had* met with ASDAH in Dec. 1972, but that rather than prompting the GC to create an archive (which was already in process), he advocated for Adventist academics to be allowed to access it, once created. This makes sense of both the documentary & the oral evidence.

# Steps towards GC Archives



- ∞ Sometime in the spring of 1973, Don Yost, then editor of *Insight*, was visited by Willis Hackett and asked if he would be interested in the position of archivist.
- ∞ April 1973: the ad hoc Archives-Archivist Committee reported to the Spring Meeting of the GC Executive Committee that there was a “need . . . for an archivist here at the headquarters office.” It recommended the appointment of an archivist, observing: “This service will be of great value in caring for our documents & records etc. that have historical and cultural value to the church.”

# Steps towards GC Archives



- œ Spring Meeting voted the funding and referred the appointment to the GC Officers
- œ May 30 1973: Officers voted, “To recommend to the Personnel Committee that Don Yost of the Review & Herald be invited to serve as General Conference Archivist”.
- œ June 6, 1973: Yost is formally asked to accept the post and does so, with a starting date of July 1st.
- œ 1975: Statistical Secretary Jesse Gibson retires at the Session: Statistical Office and Archives are merged under Yost as Director



# From Statistical Office to ASTR



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- ❧ 1940s: Statistical Office responsible for some management of GC records
- ❧ 1973: General Conference Archives founded
- ❧ 1975: GC Office of Archives & Statistics founded (AST)



## F. Donald Yost

GC Archivist 1973-75

Director of Archives and  
Statistics, 1975-95

- First Archivist of the General Conference and first Director of AST.
- Created the system of records groups that the GC Archives and Records Center still utilizes today and is copied by denominational archives around the world.

# From Statistical Office to ASTR



- ❧ 1904: position of GC Statistical Secretary established
- ❧ 1940s: Statistical Office responsible for some management of GC records
- ❧ 1973: General Conference Archives founded
- ❧ 1975: GC Office of Archives & Statistics founded (AST)
- ❧ 2011: Office of Assessment and Program Effectiveness function merged with AST...
- ❧ Now: Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR)

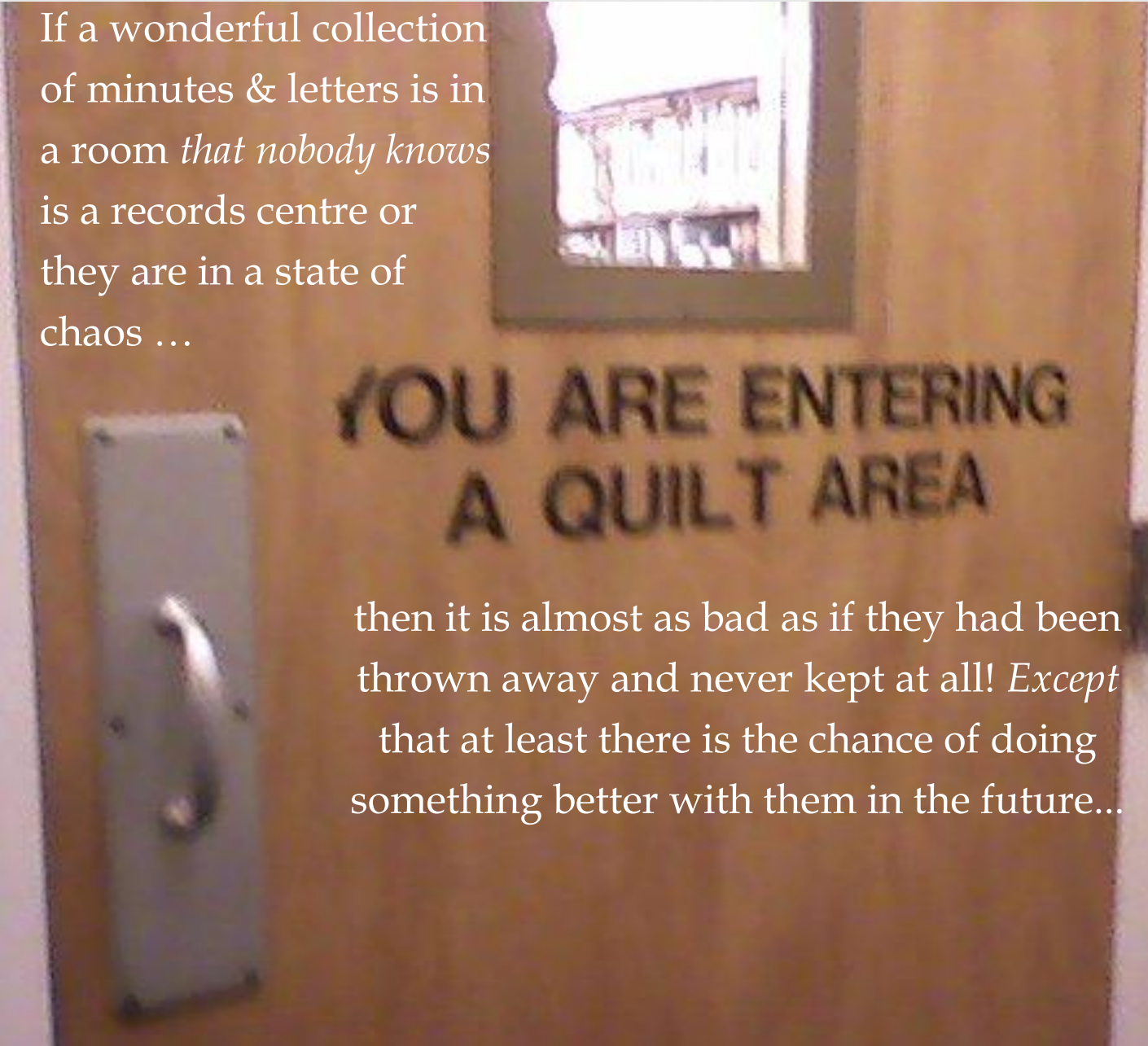
# Current State of Adventist Archives



Some reflections and observations

# How many “quilt rooms” are there in Adventist libraries?

If a wonderful collection of minutes & letters is in a room *that nobody knows* is a records centre or they are in a state of chaos ...

A photograph of a wooden door. At the top center, there is a small window with a dark frame, showing a glimpse of a room with bookshelves. Below the window, the door has a sign that reads "YOU ARE ENTERING A QUILT AREA" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. To the left of the sign is a silver door handle. The door is set in a light-colored wall.

YOU ARE ENTERING  
A QUILT AREA

then it is almost as bad as if they had been thrown away and never kept at all! *Except* that at least there is the chance of doing something better with them in the future...

# From few to many



- ❧ Before 1973 manuscript sources were available to SDA historians only in the Ellen G. White Estate offices and the archive of the Review & Herald Publ. Assoc.
- ❧ E.g., Richard Schwarz “The perils of growth 1886–1905”, in Gary Land (ed.), *Adventism in America* (1986), based on earlier research, for documentary sources relies on incoming letters from the White Estate head office; and several chapters only cite published sources.
- ❧ Admitting historians to the GC Archives transformed Adventist history: the widely-read work of e.g. Knight and Valentine would be impossible or much poorer.

# From few to many



- ✧ Now it is accepted that SDA scholars can have access to the original documents (except of course for recent records) and so many other collections are beginning to emerge.
- ✧ Church members are encouraged to donate their family papers to libraries and archives; and money is starting to be donated as well.
- ✧ We can look forward to richer, more detailed and more nuanced histories of Adventism, including of aspects very little covered in current historiography.

# Important Collections



## GENERAL CONFERENCE INSTITUTIONS:

- ❧ General Conference Archives and Records Center
- ❧ Ellen G. White Estate head office – has far more than EGW MSS!
- ❧ Review & Herald Publishing Association [future ...?]
- ❧ Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University
- ❧ Loma Linda University Library
- ❧ Oakwood University Library

## DIVISION ARCHIVES:

- ❧ European Adventist Archives, Friedensau [German-speaking]
- ❧ Archives historiques de l'adventisme francophone, Collonges
- ❧ Adventist Heritage Centre, Cooranbong [SPD historic archive]
- ❧ In progress: Helderberg College: Wessels Library and Ellen White Research Center basis for new Southern Africa Historical Archive
- ❧ Plans to make Ellen White Center at UNASP the SAD historical archive



# Important Collections



## STRONG DIVISION RECORDS CENTERS

- ❧ Southern Asia-Pacific Division Records Center
- ❧ South Pacific Division Archive
- ❧ In progress: expansion of West-Central Africa Division Records Center
- ❧ In progress: creation of Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division Records Center

## OTHER INSTITUTIONS & COLLECTIONS

- ❧ Pacific Union College Library, Walter Utt Center for Adventist History
- ❧ Newbold College Library
- ❧ Union College Library
- ❧ Ellen White Research Centre, Avondale
- ❧ James Nix personal collection

# Different Strengths



☞ CAR: is and will remain a depository of record with strengths in all areas

*BUT IN ADDITION, e.g.:*

☞ LLU: strength in history of the medical work

☞ PUC: strength in doctrinal and other controversies of the mid- to late 1970s and early 1980s, and in records relating to mission work in Asia-Pacific

☞ SWAU: strength in history of Adventism in south-western region of USA

☞ Union College: rich MSS on history in China

☞ Newbold: strengths in Adventist history in Britain, northern Europe, West Africa, the Middle East

# A caution



- ❧ Historical source collections frequently continue to be under-valued, however, having to function with too-few resources and utilizing staff who often have little or no training specific to archives, records, etc.
- ❧ In too many places, even in the last 25 years, records have been burned or tossed in a dumpster; and even today, church administrators make decisions about major institutional changes with **no** thought for the fate of archival collections. (**Not** the case with RHPA but definitely the case elsewhere in North America.)
- ❧ In other places, rare documents are lost because staff are unqualified and make basic mistakes.

# Future prospects



*A vision for the future – reflecting the fact that the role assigned in Policy to the Archivist of the General Conference goes beyond the GC archives/records center.*

# GC ARCHIVIST'S ROLE:



To develop cooperative working relationships with existing denominational archives, and assist in the development of other research and archives centers ....

To coordinate resources for denominational research throughout the denomination so as to bring about the most serviceable utilization of existing denominational source materials.

GC Executive, Minutes, 1973, p. 1867

# Working Policy & Records



The General Conference Archives determines and sets standards that *all* Unions, Conferences, Missions and Institutions are required to meet – a new union or field ought not be organised until it *demonstrates* that it meets ASTR standards for record-keeping

*Working Policy*: BA 70 *passim* (see next slide), B 75.05-5, 75.12-5, 75.15-5, App. A, II.5, III.4

# Working Policy & Records



- BA 70 05 Records Management
- BA 70 10 Records Retention
- BA 70 15 Vital Records
- BA 70 20 Ownership of Records
- BA 70 25 Literary and Other Intellectual Property Interests
- BA 70 30 Implementation

# Global vision – global objectives



- i. Consolidate rare/archival collections to achieve critical mass – adopt different organizational models
- ii. Create a network of archives (etc.), to allow for strategic decision-making and collecting
- iii. Create network of Adventist archivists and manuscript librarians for professional development etc.
- iv. GC and/or ASDAL provide more training for archivists & records managers, and manuscript librarians



# Global vision – global objectives



- v. Create new resources: Better inventories and guides to archival and MSS collections
- vi. Encourage organizational units to designate libraries in HE institutions as their archives
- vii. Make available online, in digital form, the greatest possible number and variety of historical sources
- viii. Publicize archives/MSS collections and make them seem relevant to church members of all ages

# i. Organization...



- ❧ A weakness: Too many separate and overlapping archival, manuscript and rare collections:
- ❧ E.g., Avondale College Library has a rare books collection, while the EGW Research Centre at Avondale has books & a significant collection of “document files” – but both the Library and the White Centre are distinct from the SPD’s Heritage Centre which is also at Avondale; and the Record Centre at the division office is separate again.
- ❧ CAR model at Andrews, integrating a library rare books & MSS collection, EGW Centre collection, and university archives, is excellent—I recommend it and would like to see it implemented widely around the world.

## ii. Network of institutions



- ❧ ASDAL and ALICE are essential and indispensable organizations; but there are challenges & issues that are unique to archives (including records centers and library-based MS collections) or more typical of them than of mainstream libraries.
- ❧ A new scholarly society may not be needed, but a discrete Adventist archives network, maybe meeting yearly in conjunction with ASDAL and/or as needed would help improve standards and may offer other benefits.
- ❧ Libraries could agree, in collection policies, to respect each other's strengths (see earlier slide), allowing for strategic cooperation, not competition.

## ii. Network of institutions



- ❧ We need specialization and working cooperatively, not in competition (also true of digitization)
- ❧ Where libraries *don't* have significant geographical or subject-themed collections then *don't* seek to build up collections.
- ❧ Where they *do* have specific strengths, all members of the network should work to promote those strengths and cooperate across the sector as a whole, accepting and promoting each specialization.

# iii. Network of individuals



- ❧ A network of archivists, records administrators and managers, and manuscript librarians, would help to provide support for what are currently often isolated positions.
- ❧ It could also help provide professional development, all the more needed because often librarians with no archival/records or manuscript training are assigned to archival collections.
- ❧ Again, meetings could take place in conjunction with ASDAL, or as needed (e.g. at GC Sessions)

# iv. More training needed...



- ❧ Adventist educational institutions are expanding (or exploding) dramatically; very often libraries are not given the resources they need; but historical source collections often receive even less resources. **There is a systemic problem of undertrained staff** in general and it is worse for archives/manuscript collections.
- ❧ GC Archives already provides training in records & information management for divisions and unions.
- ❧ ASDAL already works with libraries outside NAD. More could be done for those which have archival collections.

# iv. More training needed



- ❧ Current training could be expanded and offered in a more systematic way: the skillsets of staff working in archives and records management could be greatly enhanced globally by a concerted effort between the GC Archives and ASDAL (and the putative networks of Adventist archives and archivists).
- ❧ If this is not done it is likely that archives will remain under-resourced by under-trained staff.
- ❧ Irreplaceable documents will continue to be lost to unnecessary mistakes.

# v. More and better resources



- More archives and libraries need to produce Finding Aids
- E.g. ...



GENERAL CONFERENCE ARCHIVES FINDING AID SERIES

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF 6:  
**Creation**

GENERAL CONFERENCE ARCHIVES FINDING AID SERIES

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF 6: CREATION

**astr**  
Office of  
Archives, Statistics,  
and Research

150  SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH  
1863-2013  
*United for Mission*

The first in a new series of GC Archives  
Finding Aids

Edited by D.J.B. Trim  
and Benjamin J. Baker

# v. More and better resources



- ❧ More archives and libraries need to produce Finding Aids
- ❧ But more is needed than finding aids to individual collections; Also needed:
  - ❧ A researcher's guide to the GC Archives
  - ❧ Guide to sources on sabbatarian and adventist history in Adventist university and college libraries – including summaries of holdings, at least at collection level
  - ❧ Perhaps initially in North America only?
  - ❧ But then an overall guide to the sources of SDA history, in academic libraries, denominational archives and in other archives/libraries
- ❧ There is a potential opportunity for ASDAL and ASDAH to work collaboratively

# vi. Dedicated archives needed



- ❧ I am encouraged by the number of records centers being established at all levels of organization. But a records center in a headquarters will often be unable to handle historical research.
- ❧ I encourage librarians to liaise with conference and mission, union, and division Secretaries – suggest that your library become their designated historical archive (as is happening in, e.g., SID)

# vii. Make the ADL a reality



- ❧ We need to make available online, in digital form, the greatest possible number and variety of historic sources.
- ❧ There is a window of opportunity for the ADL to become what libraries would like it to be.
- ❧ If ASDAL doesn't act, then church leaders will take charge and it may develop in ways that would be less than ideal.
- ❧ I hope we all rise to the current challenge.

# viii. Publicize archives and Adventist resources



- ☞ Are you on Twitter? GC Archives is: [@GCArchives](https://twitter.com/GCArchives)
- ☞ Facebook pages normally get low 1,000s of views but some get 30K+
- ☞ **Your institution could be doing the same: you as librarians are ideally suited to supply intelligent and spiritual factoids, photos, etc., all part of the quest to direct church members and esp. young people to *good* resources.**

# Prospects for the future are bright



But greater cooperation and collaboration  
will be essential if we are to make that  
prospective future for Adventist archives and  
MS libraries a reality, rather than **just** a  
vision.