

Special Project

AMICA BULLETIN ARCHIVES

While in attendance at annual AMICA conventions, I often speak with new members. A topic that emerges frequently is an inability to review AMICA's history. Who were the key players in those early years? What were the significant events? What were some of the important milestones? And so it goes.. It has become clear to me that dissemination to our members of our AMICA history (archives) needs to be addressed.

Following completion of archiving the whole of the AMICA Technicalities, the whole of The Billings Rollography, the whole of the Howe Collection catalog, and my own web site of original literature, it dawned on me that archiving the whole of AMICA's Bulletins is not too much more than what I've already done for AMICA.

I have a near complete set of all AMICA Bulletins. President John Motto-Ros has kindly made available to me original issues of the 3 issues I'm missing, all emerging from bound copies prepared by Bob and Ginny Billings who gifted them to AMICA.

A beginning has been made. As at time of writing this report (Feb. 2008), all AMICA Bulletins 1964 through to 1977 have been archived. My objective is to have it all done and committed to a DVD as a gift to AMICA at its 2008 Board meeting in July. Time will tell if this target date is feasible. It's too early to tell.

The project is emerging in 3 elements:

- All Bulletins committed to a self-starting DVD in high resolution PDF format.
- All Bulletins uploaded into our AMICA web site in low resolution PDF format.
- A comprehensive complete index of all articles available on-line and on the DVD.

I am working with a conventional flat bed scanner, and reviewing every single page of every Bulletin to set the exposure, brightness, contrast, etc., for best quality of every page. The older Bulletins are not as good quality for reproduction as those of today. The newer Bulletins got progressively better as printing technology improved over the years. Unavoidably, every page requires different optimum settings to achieve a reasonable balance of quality based on variables such as overly dark original photos, occasional washed out printing, show-through with thinner paper, etc.

As I archive each Bulletin into high-resolution PDF format, I simultaneously optimize it into a low resolution PDF document for display on our AMICA web site. This is because the high resolution PDF files I create are very large, ordinarily considered too large for web display purposes, particularly for those members who have slow dial-up access to the internet.

As I archive each year of AMICA Bulletins, I also go through every PDF issue page by page and extract article titles, authors and contributors. The objective is to copy this data into a master Bulletin Index in a spreadsheet format. As this master Bulletin Index is periodically updated, I upload a copy to Karl Ellison, our Webmaster. He in turn converts the updated spreadsheet into HTML format, then uploads both into our web site. His objective is to make the index available in 2 formats to facilitate searching and sorting. Karl's skills in spreadsheets and web maintenance far exceed what little I can do.

Initially, this master Bulletin Index will contain basic data. Each entry will have a companion indicator as to a specific Bulletin Vol #, Issue #, and date. By the very nature of what I'm doing, the index may emerge containing entries that may one day be considered superfluous. At this time, I have chosen to err on the side of completeness.

This master Bulletin Index is simply a starting point. Its format will make it possible for other far more clever people than me to pick it up and introduce enhancements. The most obvious enhancement will be hypertext links whereby a viewer can simply click on an entry and instantly view the target article. This enhancement is beyond my abilities, but I believe it to be critically important to provide a flexible starting point upon which others can build.

Our commercial printer, Engler Printing, in Sandusky Ohio, has been printing our AMICA Bulletins since midsummer 1999. Jay Engler has kindly made available to us his production PDF files of all issues since then. As a consequence, I do not need to archive our AMICA Bulletins beyond this point, but I will be adding their content to our master Bulletin Index.

It should be noted the PDF files emerging from Engler Printing are of extremely high quality, with relatively small file size. This is because he is working with original documents and articles provided to him by our members through our 2 AMICA Publishers in this time period, using high-end professional quality software, way beyond AMICA's or my budget.

The unavoidable process I am using requires every page of every Bulletin in a bitmapped-image, not a mix of text and pictures. As a consequence, my bitmapped PDF files are larger than Engler's PDF files, and not quite as good visual quality, which is why I'm scanning every page at high-resolution. The final DVD I gift to AMICA will have all issues in high resolution.

In the future, as each issue of the AMICA Bulletin is published, a PDF copy of it will be provided by our Publisher to be added to our web site and to the DVD. I understand that the most current 18 months of Bulletins will be withheld from our web site to protect their intrinsic value as a printed document.

The Master DVD needs to be constantly updated and security copies replicated. This is an opportunity for the AMICA Archives Committee to have on it the technical skills needed to update the Master Archives DVD.

As all members will have free access to all AMICA Bulletins on-line within the Members-Only area of our AMICA web site (less most current 18 months), the Board may wish to consider making copies of the DVD available only on demand for a reasonable fee to be determined. As the Master Archive DVD will be constantly updated as a living archive, it may not be prudent to manufacture large quantities for sale, at least not until the first DVD overflows its 8.5 gigabyte limit. It would be very prudent to produce several security copies each time it is updated and have them located in different off-site locations.

There is no question that paper documents last longer than digital documents. No different than paper music rolls will last longer than digital midi files of same content, by contemporary technical standards. Therefore digital preservation becomes an issue that the Board and all members should be concerned about. At this time, the dominant digital data preservation strategy is "Many copies, like leaves in the wind."

Realistically, digital data preservation will evolve and the technical component of our AMICA Archives committee must be responsible for maintaining currency in data preservation technology. Within the next 10-15 year time frame, there will emerge a need to copy the Master Archive DVD into a new format of whatever is the leading edge storage technology of the day, and so on into perpetuity.

The dominant objective of this project is to make our AMICA history available to all members. While I may have one of very few complete paper archives of our AMICA Bulletins, it serves little purpose if I'm the only one able to view it. Hopefully, my gift of this DVD will be seen as beneficial to our members, old and new, and facilitate broad dissemination.

Regards,

Terry Smythe Winnipeg Manitoba, Canada
Member since 1971