

# Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

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Office of the Secretary of State

## Employee Spotlight

### Meet Scott Sackett

#### **What is your role at the State Archives?**

My title is Electronic Records Management Consultant, though I work with records in all forms. I train, consult with, and develop resources for agencies of local and state government to assist them in the proper retention, management, and preservation of their public records. A good deal of my contact with agencies is virtual – phone calls, emails, live and pre-recorded webinars – but I also perform in-person trainings and onsite consultations. I also work on retention schedule updates and facilitate records transfers.

#### **What do you find the most challenging at the State Archives?**

The development and maintenance of division-wide policies and procedures (for appraisal, indexing, transfer, etc.) presents challenges at pretty much *any* organization. The division has made *huge* strides on this in the last few years, which helps tremendously when you need to, say, develop a training module on archival transfer that accurately represents current practice at all of the branches.

#### **What has been your favorite project at the State Archives?**

I could never choose just one. I loved working with agencies on Local Records Grant projects from 2004 through 2015 (and look forward to doing so again this biennium!)



*Scott Sackett, Electronic Records Management Consultant.*



*Scott Sackett (left) and family.*

**If you could interview one Washingtonian (dead or alive, non-family member), who would it be and why?**

J.P. Patches (Chris Wedes). I'm not sure if that's a twofer, as I'd love to interview both the clown and the man behind him. I moved to Seattle in 1984 at the age of 13 – about three years after his program went off the air – but J.P. showed up everywhere in Seattle over the next 25-plus years, so I got to meet him and chat occasionally. He seemed like a man of tremendous wit and heart – a blend of Sid Caesar and Fred Rogers, with enough salt to tip the balance toward Sid.

### **Do you have any tips on how to efficiently search the Archives?**

**Talk with your archivist.** You may be familiar with certain types of records from previous research, but if you can describe the information that you're hoping to find (beyond "everything available on X"), they can often connect you with sources that would never have occurred to you.

**Keep track of where you've looked.** Document what records you've looked at, even if they were a complete bust. I've worked with some researchers who ended up checking the same dry well on multiple visits, and others who were trying to track down the provenance of a record that they had copied at some earlier point in their research.

**Be flexible and creative in your online searches.** Neither manual transcription nor OCR is perfect, and variant spellings abound, so use word/name fragments in your searches. (This is also a good strategy for searching records retention schedules.)

### **What is the strangest thing you have ever discovered in your research?**

Nothing comes to mind on the records retention end. On the archival research end, a piece of horse hide here, a bullet there (both from criminal case files). And on a statistically unlikely number of occasions, I've opened up logs/registers and immediately encountered my last name.

### **How were you inspired to become an archivist?**

I am a proud testament to the power of outreach. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Mike (Saunders), Janette (Gomes), and Phil (Stairs) for opening my eyes to the coolest of professions (in my admittedly biased view). In the fall of 2002, I read a newspaper article about a tour and talk that would be held at the Puget Sound Branch to celebrate Archives Week. I'd never been there, so my wife and I decided to attend. As soon as I got back in the stacks, surrounded by records, I was hooked, and started volunteering once a week shortly thereafter. That led to

Western Washington University's Archives and Records Management program, an internship at the State Archives in Olympia—and gainful employment.

**Before working at the Archives, what was the most interesting job you've ever had?**

That would have to be my two years in Guinea, West Africa, with the Peace Corps (1996-1998). I taught English at the high school level in a town called Dalaba, and also assisted the community in development work—AIDS education, getting funding for a community library, etc. Dalaba had 10,000 people, two phone lines (one for the prefect, the other one for the rest of us), and semi-dependable electricity maybe eight months out of the year. While my French has since deteriorated to Cookie Monster-level, I can still remember my marketplace Pulaar, and would pay good money for a decent plate of maafe tiga (rice with peanut sauce) or maafe hakko (rice with leaf sauce).

**What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last year?**

Everyone should have a good editor.

**What are you most afraid of, and what is it stopping you from doing?**

Beyond a certain point (10 feet?), I'm afraid of heights. While it's kept me alive, it has also kept me from going all-out on rooftop decorations on more than one Christmas.

**How would your friends describe you?**

Sincere, irreverent. Sometimes intense.

**What's your talent?**

Chasing down answers—I love doing research. I'm also good at finding heavy objects in the dark with my toes.

**Which movie is the best sequel?**

Everybody says *The Empire Strikes Back*, but the correct answer is *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*.

**Tell about an embarrassing moment at work.**

I'd rather not. You first.

**Do you have an office nickname?**

**What is it?**

A few of my colleagues have referred to me by the name my Guinean students gave me, Mistah Scotch Jacket (Mistah Scotch for short).



Scott Sackett (top-middle) and family.

**What would be the ultimate gift for you to receive?**

The ability to occasionally experience my children at a younger age for 15 minutes. I don't want them to stop growing up; I just wish I could visit their earlier incarnations now and then.

**Which movie or book character do you identify with the most?**

Elwood P. Dowd. (Wishful thinking, perhaps.)

**What is your biggest pet peeve?**

Long questionnaires. Seriously, though, probably second-guessing.

**Fill in the blank: If you really knew me, you would know \_\_\_\_\_.**

...that I was probably going to finish this sentence like this.

**Is silence golden or awkward?**

The two are not mutually exclusive, in my experience (though I find the latter more common).

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