

Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

September 2016



Employee Spotlight

Meet Mary Hammer

This month's Employee Spotlight showcases Digital Projects Archivist, Mary Hammer.

What is your role at the State Archives?

I work on digital projects, so my role is to oversee the digitization and cataloging of state records (particularly photograph and map collections) for online access. I also get to coordinate our social media (check out our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages!)

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

The [Digital Archives](#) is an excellent resource for records that have been digitized. I would recommend starting there, especially for photographs and vital records. However, only a very small percentage of our records are online, so contact the Archives if you strike out there. Records in the Archives are organized by the agency that created them, which means a single item likely won't be discoverable with a catalog search. [Communicating with a Reference Archivist](#) about what you're looking for is essential—they can direct you to the appropriate agency's records, and give you finding aids to help narrow down your search.

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

I've encountered a lot of wonderfully strange items in the Archives. One, off the top of my head, is early marriage affidavits. These were signed by the bride and groom, and stated: "I am not feeble minded... a common drunkard... and am not afflicted with any contagious venereal disease. (The last clause does not apply to females)." I guess ladies got a free pass!

What legacy would you like to leave at the Archives?

A legacy of enhanced access to public records! I firmly believe in providing easy access to state records—they belong to the people. I love that making records available online provides access to anyone with an internet connection, no matter where they are. They don't even have to travel to Olympia.

If you could change anything about the Archives, what would it be?

People's awareness of what they can find in the Archives and how it can help them. Archives have long been thought of as stuffy, old, dark, "basementy" places. Our Archives is filled with fascinating photographs, maps, and documents—and our Research Room is brightly lit with a great staff who can help you find just about anything!



Mary (right) is shown working on the "How to Assemble an Archives Box" video.

What has been your favorite project at the State Archives?

I've enjoyed so many projects, so I'll go with my favorite this year. Amber Raney, Nicole Kindle, Patrick Williams and I created a short video on ["How to Assemble an Archives Box"](#) for state and local agencies. We tried to make it entertaining, and it was a lot of fun to put together!

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

It's a tie. First, in college, I worked summers at Zion National Park in Southern Utah. I was surrounded by geologic beauty, hiked every day, explored underground springs,

and met people from all over the world. Second, my first library job was at Houghton Library in Cambridge. I helped process the literary papers of New Directions Publishing Company, which meant I was able to handle correspondence and manuscripts by modernist poets like Ezra Pound, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, William Carlos Williams, and Gary Snyder. At the time, they were starving artists, so it was interesting to read their worries and aspirations before their successes. Also, it really brought home the importance of mentorship.

If you could witness any event in Washington history, which would you choose and why?

The first thing that comes to mind is Seattle's Century 21 Exposition in 1962. Very recent history, I know. But the theme was future oriented, and centered on the role science and technology might play in everyday life during the 21st century. I like perusing the pictures of what they imagined life (our lives) might be like – all with that mid-century flair. It would have been very exciting to see what might be possible in the future, backed up with what was then "new" science.

If you could go back in time to the day you graduated college to give yourself advice, what would it be?

I wasted a lot of energy worrying about the future, instead of enjoying what was right in front of me. So, I would tell myself: "RELAX."

Tell about an embarrassing moment at work.

I used to work at the Academy of Natural Sciences' archive in Philadelphia. I gave an archives tour to a group of lepidopterists, and the intensity of their stares surprised me; they were above and beyond attentive. Looking in the mirror afterward, I saw that I had a giant dollop of brown stuff on my nose. It was cappuccino. Lesson learned: give tours with food on your face, and people will pay attention.

What would be the title of your autobiography?

"Getting Hammered." Maybe that's inappropriate. Then "Hammer Time." Although I might get sued. So, "This is not a Drill." Dang, I love the nerdy puns.

Describe what you were like at age 10.

Reading books, playing in irrigation ditches, all the while obsessed with wearing dresses and purple boots.

Do you have an office nickname? What is it?

I seem to have more than one: "Hamms," "Mayhem," "Queen of the Macabre" and the simple "MaryHammer."



Mary (left) shows us where the "Queen of the Macabre" nickname comes from, dressed in her Sylvia Plath Halloween costume.

