

Pamela Spetter Schwartz – Oral History Transcription

Interviewee: **Pamela Spetter Schwartz**

Interviewers: **Jen Haney-Conover** (Warren Co. Archives Director), **Tori Otten** (Archives Technician)

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List of Initials: JC (Jen Haney-Conover), TO (Tori Otten), PS (Pamela Schwartz)

Location of Interview: Warren County Admin Building in Lebanon, Ohio

Transcriber: Ted Hitchens (Records Specialist)

[Begin transcription 00:00:03]

TO: So today is Friday, June 24th, 2022 and we are working on our Warren County employee oral history project. My name is Tori Otten and I am the archival specialist here at the Warren County Records Center and Archives.

JC: I am Jen Haney-Conover, I am the director of records management and archives here at Warren County.

TO: Today we are going to let our guest introduce herself and then we will begin the interview.

PS: Okay. My name is Pamela Spetter Schwartz and I am currently a collections supervisor at Sinclair Community College library.

TO: Okay so just to get some background from you, Pam, what was your position here at Warren County?

PS: I was the records manager and archivist.

TO: Perfect. So in other general background, when and where were you born?

PS: I was born in Dayton (*Ohio*) at Good Samaritan Hospital which is no longer there sadly. And that was on May 23rd, 1971. I'm sure my mother remembers it well.

TO: So where did you grow up? In Dayton then?

PS: Yes, I grew up in Upper Dayton View which is actually- more specifically the Dayton View Triangle which is right across from Good Samaritan Hospital's former location. And it was a wonderful place to grow up because it was- the neighborhood was filled with people who were interested in integrating by religion, by ethnicity, by color. It was just a wonderful place to live.

TO: That's wonderful. So where have you lived besides there?

PS: Well, briefly I lived in Columbus. I got my bachelor's degree at Ohio State University and then I came back to Dayton to go to graduate school.

TO: So when you worked for the county, did you live in Dayton that whole time as well?

PS: Yes I did. I had a couple of residences ... At first I was- I was living in a condo in downtown Dayton. Condos had become the new thing. It was the very first unit of condos in downtown Dayton. And then I was living in an apartment in the Oregon District. Then I lived in an apartment in Washington Township which is probably the closest I'd gotten to Warren County. And then finally bought a home in the Oregon District.

TO: That's amazing.

JC: Is that where you're still now?

PS: No, good question! So that was during work time. My husband and I moved to Oakwood which is a separate (part of) Dayton and we actually had two of our kids at the home in the Oregon District and then the third as soon as we moved to Oakwood, and I'm told that happens a lot when people move – they have another baby.

TO: I will keep that in mind!

JC: I never knew that.

TO: So what jobs did you have prior to working at Warren County?

PS: I came here directly from Culture Works and I was the programs associate there – programs and services associate – and I basically facilitated the grant allocation process for small- to mid-sized arts and culture organizations in the Miami Valley area. Culture Works at that time included eleven counties and their constituency. And let's see, well I had worked at Montgomery County in the records center there while I was in graduate school and I was basically a records center specialist, so I would grab files and I delivered them. I had a little luggage cart and I lugged boxes around downtown Dayton – yeah back in the dinosaur days. And I came to that position because Bob Smith, whom you know, was the records manager and archivist at Warren County at that time, and he had been my adjunct professor at Wright State.

TIME 00:05:00 MARK

PS: He eventually became head of the archives there before Don (*Dawn?*) Dewey. And so when he left Wright State to go to Montgomery County, he gave a lot of his graduate students jobs. But I always kept in touch with him. I considered him my mentor and- because he had the inside track on all the jobs. And when Warren County became available, he contacted me and said you would be great at this. My intention was to go into gallery museum management in museum work. Another brief position I held at graduate school was working as an art handler in the Dayton Art Institute. I was doing everything I could – like with Culture Works – to get the experience I needed. At one point I worked as an intern at the Great Southern Hotel art gallery in Columbus. I just really wanted to work in the arts because my undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Fine Arts in studio art. But with the graduate work in museum and archival administration, Bob was telling me “you're prepared to do either one, and you can go back and forth as often as you like.” So I said okay, and I submitted my resume and I think it took about three months for Warren County to make a decision because, you know, things happen very slowly in government. And I was just thrilled when I got the call from Beth Deckard (*Warren County Recorder 1985-2012*). Absolutely thrilled. And that was in 1998. I believe I started in August of 1998 if I'm not mistaken.

TO: So in that case, how long did you end up working for Warren County?

PS: I was here for ten years. And you will find – because we're all record-keepers here – you will find that there is a record of- a payroll record for me into 2009 because James (*James Zimmerlin, Warren Co. Records Manager 2008-2013*) filed something improperly, and I ended up getting paid in 2009 which is fine!

TO: Yeah, works out!

PS: Yeah it does, it works out.

JC: It was probably vacation and- you might have gotten some sick time at that point—

PS: There was something that he'd forgotten to do and I said whatever, you know, so long as I get paid.

JC: We've all done it!

TO: So since you were our first records manager in our current building and location, where were you when you were hired? What location was records management placed in?

PS: Sure, I'll do my best to remember. Let's see. So when I started, I actually shared the County Recorder's office- I shared Beth Deckard's office on Silver Street which was the original administration—well, no it wasn't the original- the former administration building. And there was a little table in there stocked with journals and papers and a chair. And Beth's desk was behind me and there was a private restroom off to the side, so all the Recorder's employees would march behind my chair to go to the bathroom and I sat there (*laughter*) and looked at- no I didn't look at my watch, I'm kidding, but they were probably just as uncomfortable about using the restroom next to me as I was about sitting there. But, you know, they didn't want to use the public restroom. Whatever.

TO: Fair enough, I guess. So if you were there, where were all of your records coming from?

PS: Okay, so records were all over the place. There were some in the basement of the Common Pleas building. There were fenced areas down there that were given to each department to store whatever they needed to store...

JC: Is this Common Pleas that's over here?

PS: Yes.

JC: Okay.

TO: Okay.

TIME 00:10:00 MARK

PS: And the Recorder had a very large fenced-in area down there where all of the archives were stored. There were also – let's see – there were records in ... I'm sorry, I'm going to have to think about that one for a little bit because that one's in my mind's eye—I think we moved things around. We moved records to the old jail on Silver Street. That's because they needed to clear out the basement at Common Pleas. And we also had records in the barn behind ... what building is that? It's in proximity to this campus. There was a barn...

TO: Interesting!

PS: I want to say- If we went outside I could probably remember where it was by sight.

JC: Was it close to the old Infirmary-slash-Health and Human Services building?

PS: Sort of between there and here.

JC: Okay. So that was probably where (*indecipherable*) Facilities—they built most of that up in the last five to fifteen years. And so my guess is it's probably somewhere around there that's where it was.

PS: Okay. Yeah. And the whole- the thing about moving records again and again was that it was, of course, detrimental to the record. Well, it could've been. And in many cases because of what they were subject to in terms of weather and infestation and just being available to whomever unsupervised was problematic. Everyone knew that. I mean that was why I was hired to remedy all that. So, where would you like to go from there?

TO: I guess I have a question that has spawned off of that. If everything was held anywhere it would fit, I suppose, what did it look like for a records request process from the public? Like what would it take to be able to see one of those records that was held potentially in a barn or a basement or a jail or such thing?

PS: Sure. Those who were most familiar with it at the time were the genealogists. And they were working in these conditions sweating, you know, dirty and they were the only ones who knew what was going on. So they were really valuable to the information management of this administration.

JC: So what was that process like? What was the decision that made it smart to actually have everything put into one location? How did that develop?

PS: Well, Montgomery County had been the beacon for the state of Ohio in terms of establishing a central records storage space. And Steve – I don't remember his last name, Bob Smith can tell you. Steve W. maybe? He started the whole thing. The whole philosophy was based on his experience. And Warren County was growing very rapidly and wanted to be up there with the biggest and the baddest, so... I spent a lot of time touring other facilities and gathering ideas and getting familiar with products and people and hoping that we would have the best of the best and- and we did. We created a state-of-the-

art facility for its time. Everybody wanted to come see it. And, you know, the only thing that everybody – and probably to this day – would say was it's in a basement.

TIME 00:15:00 MARK

JC: Next to the retention pond.

TO: Yes!

PS: Yeah. So, you know, what take what we can get I guess. When we finally moved records out of the barn and out of the basement of Common Pleas, there was plenty of infestation by rodents and it was foul. So we needed to create a place where hopefully we could prevent that sort of damage to the county's history.

JC: Yeah.

TO: Well in that regard, how was the process of moving those records into this space? Did you have active infestations you had to work around, or ... Just the management of it seems stressful.

PS: Well first of all, the- the records center space during construction was subject to a lot of rain. And there was a lot of rain that continued to come in even after it had walls and a roof because- it was just under construction and water would come right down the loading dock and that's why there's so much rust on the girders in the records center. At least that's my take on it.

JC: It makes sense.

PS: I'm no professional in terms of how the substructure of a building can change when subject to water, but then maybe I should be! So let's see, you had asked me about...? Sorry, I lost my train of thought.

TO: Actually getting the records from their locations and if you had to deal with any infestations or organizations of people.

PS: Sure ... We were very fortunate that we did not have infestation here. And we were able to, in the process of- because we'd all gone over to the barn to prepare the records to come over here. And we were able to very quickly inspect and make sure that what was coming was at least only dirty. And that was pretty much the case, you know, it was a matter of eventually unboxing and cleaning what we had and Pat Grove worked religiously on that. It took years, I'm told, she started that while I was here and

the instructions from me were to take the wills and the estates out of their nineteenth-century sleeves, unfold them, clean them and then store them flat in file folders and boxes of archival (*indecipherable*) and she did that. And I think what's really wonderful is that she- she did discover a lot of important information in the process because she could read through what she was doing. And there was no rush. What did we have? We had time. So, you know, we didn't experience a ton of traffic down here in the basement. (If) somebody wanted to do research, they were certainly welcome to come in once we had all the roller shelves. When- when other elected officials moved into this building – the administration building – we acquired their roller shelving which was nice so we could store all of the books and there was also roller shelving that came from these various locations where the records had been stored prior to this building existing and—So it was possible for a researcher, a genealogist, to come in and sit very comfortably and do whatever they wanted because we had unloaded it and reloaded it and unloaded it and reloaded it. We knew where everything was. We had knowledge management and all of that. And, you know, it was kind of a- it was a very risky way to exist because if something happens to the person who knows everything, then you're in trouble.

TIME 00:20:00 MARK

PS: Now to move things- Before we finally moved into the records center- simply to move things from temporary place to temporary place, we used labor from the jail. And, you know, the inmates were offered an opportunity. And they wanted to get out of there, they didn't want to sit in a cell, so they would come in their orange jumpsuits and, you know, slippers and- There was never ... There was once a problem – so I can't say never, but the majority of the time it was fine. And I was happy that we had free labor. Technically, the taxpayers were paying for them to be there but it was good for everybody. And the Building Services guys (*now Facilities Management*), you talk about building positive relationships with the people who work the hardest around here and I really- I enjoyed getting to know those guys. When we were moving records, it was so much fun for me because they'd say "well it's lunchtime let's go" and we would all go. And we'd go over to the old IGA and get a sandwich and we'd eat together; it was just so much fun for me. I loved listening to them talk and joke and kid each other and, you know, it was fun.

TO: So there's a rumor that I heard about this space that our current records storage is that you might be able to tell me if it's true or false.

PS: I'll do my best.

TO: Someone had told me before there was a roof that there was so much water in the basement that people actually canoed through there. Do you know if that's real or not?

PS: I do not know. I have never heard that.

TO: That was from a couple people. Facilities individuals have told us that.

JC: I've heard that from at least three or four different individuals from Facilities...

PS: Okay, well that doesn't surprise me.

TO: Yes. I know they have a canoe because they use it to get over to the fountain in the pond when it needs fixed.

PS: Well I would ask Jake Jones (*former Facilities Management supervisor*) about that if you can because he was probably in one of those canoes. Jake was in charge of everything. Jake did a great job. He was- he was a good guy and I can tell you the Christmas tree story that involved him directly or indirectly if you want to hear it.

TO: Absolutely.

PS: Well, it took some time to convince the Records Commission that this was a true professional operation and at one point—maybe you still have the fifteen-footer, the Christmas tree that you put in the lobby?

TO: I'm not sure if it's that tall. It might be ten?

JC: I feel like there was one- When I first started, there was one that was definitely large than the one they use now.

PS: Okay. Well this one was enormous. And after its first Christmas, the commissioners told Jake to move it to the records center. And I just happened to see Jake, and he said in his dead-pan way "well there's a Christmas tree coming your way in about fifteen minutes." And I said "what?" And he told me what was going on and I said "oh no." And I went to the Recorder, Beth Deckard, and I said "Beth you gotta support me on this one, and her reaction was "What?? No way. No way." So she came down to the basement and told Jake because he was like don't-shoot-the-messenger. But he needed to hear from an elected official, not from me, that it wasn't going to happen. And so she told him that tree is not coming down to be stored in the records center ... Maybe that was the intention to store it there, that we had a storage facility. So my task was to document the conversation that the elected officials had concerning the designated use of the records center. And it was very clearly stated on tape – and transcribed into minutes and they signed off on it at the next meeting – that this facility was for records storage only. So at that point the tree had to find a new home. I don't know where they put it. I think that it got damaged over the years because of the way it was cared or not cared-for.

TIME 00:25:00 MARK

PS: But I will never forget that I- I was putting in for professional travel, and the refusal came down from upstairs with like big, bold capital letters "No" (*laughter*). So, you know, we had an interesting relationship but for the most part- I should say largely, it was a pleasure to work for the elected officials here. Is that now on?

TO: It was absolutely recorded.

PS: I also remember when I started here and I said to Beth Deckard before I accepted the position, I said "Well I want you to know that it is my intention to take off work for the Jewish holy days." And she said "Oh, well we've never experienced that before, so let me get back to you." And she went to talk to the commissioners and to the county administrator at the time and she came back to me and told me- she thought it was hilarious that they said "Well it was bound to happen one of these days." So, they first time I met the elected officials and the commissioners, Beth took me to a tiny room in the old administration building downstairs where their offices were. And the three of them were sitting behind a table smoking, and the door was closed so the room was completely engulfed in cigarette smoke and I stood in there like "Very nice to meet you" (*mimicking raspy voice and coughing*). And so, it was a different time and in my tenure here, Ohio did ban smoking in most public places so that did not go down quietly here. And the judges had the authority to do whatever they wanted, so- And I forgot to mention that at one point – see, I need to tell these stories because it's all coming back! I had an office – a very nice office – at the Common Pleas Court. And Jim Spaeth who was the county Clerk of Courts—

JC: He's still here.

PS: Okay! He gave me that space. He's a great guy. So the judges had the authority to override whatever the state was saying, I guess, that's what I'm told. So there was a designated smoke room inside our building! Mostly because the judge said he didn't our constituency to drive up and find employees standing outside smoking cigarettes.

JC: So it's better to do it inside!

PS: Yeah.

JC: There were still signs in 2013. They obviously had- you couldn't do that for several years at this point, but there were still signs that said "Designated Smoking Areas" in 2013 when I came, because they just hadn't gotten rid of the signs. And they still had that on some of the bathrooms too.

PS: Well, funny little note – the ice machine in the administration building, in this administration building, was in a designated smoking room. So you couldn't get ice because it tasted like smoke.

JC: Oh my gosh!

TO: It's now out there in the lobby.

PS: Oh the old ice machine, it still runs.

TO: If it's the same one – it's an ice machine—

PS: It probably is.

JC: They work on it all the time.

PS: That's funny, rather than get a new one.

JC: Well the funny thing is... So, a couple years- so, several years ago- it was probably 2015, '16, '17- something. We had – and I feel like you were instrumental in this – we had a water filtration system (*PS: Oh yeah*). So we were one of the few that had that, so thank you for that!

TO: It was phenomenal!

PS: Well good!

JC: And so... When the new manager-director of Facilities Management came in, he had seen all of these departments having like Culligan Water (*local freshwater company*). He was like “Why are we doing this when we can have...” I think, something- I don't know if he had seen what we had downstairs because clearly that had been there for years at this point. And they went through and several offices within the county now has a filtration system that also does ice. There are still people that do get ice occasionally. I think there's a couple Commissioners' departments that for whatever reason didn't want to have that in their office... It was not that hard of a process to do!

TIME 00:30:00 MARK

PS: ... I didn't orchestrate a water filtration system but I did bring in, like you said, Culligan because we wanted to have our own— So there's a water filtration system?

JC: I thought you were the one that did it!

TO: There are these- there are these tall black pieces of machinery that dispense water, ice, hot water and it is in the old kitchen area. And back by the fridge and the sink and it is directly connected into the water lines of the county. And they all are, so now multiple departments have them and they're just directly connected into the water—

PS: I honestly don't remember that, so if it happened—

JC: I have been giving you applause for that, so I mean just take it. Maybe Jana (*Jana Wells, former archives technician*) – or when we talk to James, because we're going to be talking to James sometime in the next week or two and get a little more insight, maybe I should be giving him applause for that.

TO: I will say in regards to your free labor from inmates, they actually still do that. They are not directly connected to most departments but there is a community service program where certain individuals are allowed to participate in litter collection and such on the highways, and they actually are in our basement here every morning and they come in and they are one of the top people I see use the ice machine because they fill up large coolers because they're going to be outside in the heat all day. So they are some of the main people who use the ice machine interestingly.

PS: All of this is making me think of, for whatever reason, jogging my memory about our relationship with Montgomery County, and we arranged to bring all of our microfilm from Iron Mountain (*nationwide information management company based in Boston*) to Montgomery County to store in their temperature and humidity controlled vault. And additionally if there were some- some jobs that for whatever reason we couldn't do, they helped us out on a couple things. I will say that one of my— one of the things I insisted on was maintaining a planetary camera because you never know when something's going to come along that is too large to be scanned. For all I know, there may be gargantuan scanners now, but ... Additionally, you don't want to scan something that's very delicate; never ever want to automatically scan anything like that as you know. So related to the maps that are framed on the walls, we put in the time capsule a story about how we captured image and I think you might have that on your website, do you not?

TO: I'm not certain.

JC: I think so. We may not have the story, but I believe the image- So when you guys did that, it was like a four-part...?

PS: Yes.

JC: We have that image.

PS: We used the planetary camera to capture four enormous quadrants of the even more enormous map. And then Gary Browning in our I.T. department asked one of his staff to digitally stitch those images together. It was so seamless that you had to PDF or whatever it was but you could also print it out and (*indecipherable*) ...thing. It was a really cool thing, so... In the- in the time capsule is a large-format printout of what we accomplished in addition to the narrative that I wrote to help explain to the future- how we did that. And they'll probably think "Gee, why on earth did they do that?" But, you know, it's all- it's all part of the history.

TO: So when you made (the) records center exist, it's here – Pat Grove (*former archives employee*) told me a little bit while she was still here that when the items were being delivered, they just almost sat in a pile per se, and you guys had to quickly decide- So how did you decide how you were going to organize things?

TIME 00:35:00 MARK

PS: We had identified things that were coming over, so we didn't bring things over in their original storage containers- whatever they were in, I'm trying to remember now. We had- we actually ordered a custom box, and I don't know if you still use the dye(?) that was used to make our box.

JC: I think there's still a thing of paint, or whatever it is ... It's been there a long time and I've not done anything with it. But I just remember James saying "This has been here since Pam was here" and it was for the boxes. And other than that, I think it was for the—

TO: It might still be in the back in the microfilm cabinet.

PS: Paint?

JC: Not paint ... ink. Maybe it's ink ... I can't remember, I'd have to ask him. I haven't messed with it, that's all I know. It's not in an area that's going to be affecting anything.

PS: I don't know. So we were buying boxes at first from Montgomery County, then we got into the box business ourselves and whenever anybody needed boxes, they would come to us and they were pleasantly surprised (that) there was no fee, it was taken care of by this department. But an answer to your question, it was a matter of, you know, "put Probate there – put Clerk of Courts there" and all of the archival materials were kept closest to the entrance of the records center just so we could keep an eye on things. I mean there was one time when water was coming in from the pipes above, and one

thing that I had (*indecipherable*) was keeping plastic tarps on top of the roller units so that the water could just come down on that- proved to be very, very helpful because I just pulled the plastic down and the water kept falling, but the records were fine. I was lucky- I was working late and I caught it myself and I called Jake. I don't remember if he- I think I paged him or something. And he came right out and it was fixed up (*knocking sound*). Sounds like someone's knocking.

TO: I don't know what that is. It's not this door!

PS: Okay.

TO: Who knows.

PS: Yeah it was- it was a real fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants undertaking but, you know, that's how I work best.

TO: I like it. So what was it like then to be the very first records manager in a brand-new building, to have control of the historic and the county documents that are so useful?

PS: Well it was a tremendous responsibility (that) I was very, very proud of and I was grateful for the opportunity – what else would you like me to say about that?

TO: It's honestly up to you.

JC: How did that- so your position as records manager (or) department head, how did that change over the years? ... When you first started working here, how did your responsibilities and your role- how did it evolve by the time you left?

PS: In the beginning, there was a void. You know, it's like— creation of the world. When I was in the County Recorder's personal office space, there was a lot of questioning and a real concern for who was this- who was this person. I remember hearing many, many times "Who does she know? Who is she related to?" And the fact that it was no one and nobody was so foreign to what everyone is used to. So, you know, they had their doubts about me.

TIME 00:40:00 MARK

PS: And there were times I'm sure they were offended because, you know, they would say to me things like "Come on over and have some sausage gravy and biscuits in Treasurer's Office." And I couldn't because I don't eat pork. I'm Jewish! And I don't eat milk and meat together, so I had to say "I'm sorry, I

can't" and they must have thought I was some prissy, too-good-for-my... So at one point when I was relocated to a new office space, we did have—I remember I didn't have a phone where I was going and we did have – I forgot to mention this – Pat Womack (*former archives employee*) was stationed in wherever the records went.

TO: Interesting.

PS: So if someone needed to do some research who was not a genealogist, she could let them in. And we made sure that she was signing everybody in and out, and letting them know the rules, and no pen and that sort of thing. But Pat was working over in the barn—Why am I telling you this story? I am losing my train of thought. You asked me—?

JC: How your role changed and the roles and (*indecipherable*)...

PS: Oh yes, that was the story. Thank you ... So wherever I had relocated to, I didn't have a phone. And I asked the ladies at the Recorder's Office- I actually made a little phone log and I said "could you please take a message for me?" And they were so ticked off by that, that I had the audacity to ask that. So I learned, you know, I had to be completely respectful and, you know, to defer to my newness. And I think they were completely unaware of what my responsibility was because it wasn't their place to hear from the county recorder that she was hiring someone under the county commission to serve in this capacity, so I got a lot of questions. "So what exactly are you doing?" And I would explain--- "...Oh. Well why do we need somebody for that?" was the next question. But my role, I guess, it changed once we were in final operation in here mostly because we did represent something pretty incredible to the other counties- to the smaller counties. So I really felt like I had- I had earned a lot of respect in our community. Eventually I was asked to become records manager at Montgomery County, and I refused. I was asked directly by the county administrator which is a perfect example of nepotism because she's my friend. Now she's CEO of Children's Hospital. But, you know, it was that simple. She said "if you want the job, it's yours" and I didn't want it. So I guess that's important for me to mention too, the position at Montgomery County really intimidated me and I didn't feel that I had enough experience to go to the one that started it all.

JC: Yeah.

PS: And of course today ... wisdom comes with age ... and I absolutely could have handled it. I also was thinking more and more about my little kids and how I wanted to be available to them and how at this point in my life at fifty-one, how I was ready to not be available to them (*laughter*). I'm very lucky to have found this position at Sinclair.

TIME 00:45:00 MARK

TO: I guess in regards to individuals struggling to adapt to your new and unexpected role in the county, was it difficult for the county to- once you were up and functioning and running in the new space- was it difficult for them to transition with having to ask you guys for files or—?

PS: Oh yeah! Yes because, you know, it's on lockdown and the elected officials – their staff mostly – because the staff work with the records. They could not understand, they just- they couldn't process- "Wait, we have to send our records to you and we have to get your permission to access them?" So eventually, it was sort of like that philosophy the architect originally shared with me, when you build a wall you must also build a door. We would allow staff from, say, the auditor's office – not everybody, there was one designated person – who would come in and pull files or whatever they needed to do. We also had somebody who came in from the prosecutor's office once. We had scary things being stored in the records center. Do you still have the prosecutor's files?

JC: We have all of... We have a row that is- we call the rape-and-murder row. It's all of their high profile cases that are- that they maintain permanently.

PS: I mean there was concern on our part because there were biohazard samples and- but, we just left it alone because we- we served everybody.

TO: One thing we have actually not talked about is what- what was a standard day like for you dependent upon when you started versus once you were here and the records center was running?

PS: We also talked about how our time is mostly split eighty-twenty with eighty percent of it being administrative and twenty percent of it being what we were hired to do. I was overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities because the staff hated each other- they ... I- I mean... like, okay... I did find myself... And here's the thing, I inherited that staff ... There was nothing I could do. My hands were tied because some of the people who came to work at the records center were friends with Pat South (*former county commissioner*), some of the people had been working with Beth Deckard and nobody knew how to use a computer. So, I guess if I could talk about how I taught everyone how to use computers and... It was a time of major transition in Warren County (*JC: Yeah*). And to have the first digital scanners in the county and then to request more, and to be yelled at by a commissioner at a public meeting – "You gonna keep asking for more scanners? When is this going to stop??" was how it was put to me and I was absolutely horrified. So okay, if it's gotta stop then I guess okay maybe it's time to move on. I did reduce my hours to part-time once I had my second child. It took a year for that to go into effect. I worked full-time with two little ones and after a year- after my second child was born, I was working part-time. It became even more difficult for me to accomplish anything on a part-time schedule. I felt like I- I wasn't accomplishing anything at home, I wasn't accomplishing anything at work.

TIME 00:50:00 MARK

PS: And then of course by the time I was ready to deliver my third, that was when I decided it was time to leave. What was the last question and then I'll get you back on track?

TO: We were discussing what your days looked like.

PS: Oh, my days. Okay. So, it was a matter of working at my computer a lot. I was working on retention schedules and I was often going to various locations to do inventories, and the inventories were really hard mostly because, again, people didn't understand what I was trying to accomplish. And they were hesitant to share a lot of things with me. So there was a lot of time spent working on retention schedules. There was some opportunity to do some archival preservation and I really enjoyed teaching the staff how these things were done. They were kind of shocked when I taught them how to uncurl documents, and we got all the parts and built our own humidification chamber. And they were fascinated because they were skeptical. And when it worked, they were pleasantly shocked so I was really proud of that. The situation I told you about with the water in the actual storage area was not my only disaster recovery response. I had a minor one over at Children's Services, but I was ready because I had undergone a lot of training through the professional organizations I was associated with. And I'd say the best training I got was from NAGARA, the National Association of Government And Records Administrators. I don't know if they actually spell these things out anymore or if they just use they acronym.

JC: We usually just use the acronym now, yeah. I'm on the presidential track right now.

PS: Oh fantastic! That's wonderful.

JC: We're going to meet in Cincy next year.

PS: So, Gaylon Wilson who works for the National Archives was brought in to train us on disaster recovery and we set up in our loading dock and he trashed up a bunch of things we didn't need. And I mean he muddied them. I mean he just slopped them up. And our job was to rescue everything. And it was the things you learn about- all the things you don't have access to in an emergency really fast. And the things that are available to you are the sun and the air and your own hands. So- books, we would fan out and rest on their spines to dry and then we would press them together with heavy weights to avoid the warping. Muddy film we rinsed off with pure water. Other records we- we put out in the sun so the mud could dry so we could dust them off, which was the best way I had learned to preserve a historic document had gotten wet because you didn't want the ink to go away, you just want the mud to go away ... So there was occasional- you know, there was training, there were meetings. There were records commission and microfilm board meetings. And there were special projects like the time capsule, and yeah...

TIME 00:55:00 MARK

TO: So what do you think people- What about your role do you think people did not realize you were doing in the background, or something special that you did that no one knew you were doing?

PS: I don't think that people knew that we had the historic records of the county from the inception of it, which was okay because in terms of the lack of security that we had we didn't want to toot our horn too loudly. And eventually people began to appreciate being able to call the records manager. I will say that (*indecipherable*) Sunshine Law, I often had elected officials call me asking what the loopholes were. And that gave me great pleasure. I loved going through records— understanding the Ohio Revised Code, the administrative code, I actually thought for a long time about going to law school because of that experience and to specialize in records from a legal standpoint.

JC: I'm also thinking (*indecipherable*)... I can't tell you how many times I've thought that too.

PS: It's invigorating. It's exciting. It's cool to be able to, you know, kinda massage the law. And so when elected officials would ask me these questions, they were very careful about how they posed them. So if I didn't want ... Say I got a request for all these records from here to there, someone's fishing and "how do I respond to that?" We would go through "what is the definition of a record" and is there documentation that you are keeping this on a records retention schedule? And what does the law say about what you're supposed to keep? And if all these answers are no-no-no-no-no, then guess what. They are welcome to come in and do their own research as long as they're not confidential records. But you do not have to pay your people to do it for them. So that was- that was fun for me.

TO: Another thing that you were the individual that started was you combined the records of the county with the microfilm department. (*PS: Oh yes!*) You gained the microfilm in your department, so what was it almost like combining two entities together, I suppose you could say, and having quick access for the microfilm people to be able to be closer to the things that they were filming, I suppose?

PS: It wasn't easy. That's the bottom line. Because the microfilm staff were used to working under the Recorder directly and having no supervision. And all of a sudden, I had expectations. I also had lots of documentation that I wanted them to maintain because I wanted to- and I met a lot with them. That was a big, big part of my job actually – to get a handle on microfilm because it had never been documented exactly how they were processing it. And I not only wanted to document that and understand it, but I wanted them to sign off on every step of the microfilm production process. And that was for everybody's good – for the county, for the elected officials, for the individual employees. It was kind of like this waiver you asked me to sign. It was a way of showing that everybody did their job on the up-and-up and according to policy and procedure and nobody liked that (*laughter*).

JC: Change is hard, especially in local government. I mean change is hard for people in general, but it definitely- it shows your hands when you're implementing something that is not the norm or what the

individuals think is the norm. So I for one will say that there have been plenty of times where we've gone through and looked at old log forms from 2004 to verify if something was done or not.

TIME 01:00:00 MARK

TO: Excellent resource.

JC: ... So there may have been a pain-in-the-rear back in 2002 ...

PS: That makes me feel wonderful! (*laughter*)

JC: ... To ask people to do something they didn't want to do, but in the long run- things like that are good. They stay in policy and procedure.

TO: And your original staff members who were still here when we were here ... They very much- because I was part of the microfilm department. They were very adamant with me, like "you need to fill out these documents every step of the way."

PS: Oh good! They absolutely took a lot of pride in their work and it was just the transition. Like you said, in local government it's tough even though they're considered— well, you know, it's a big- it's a big county now. Everything is modernized and there's a lot of sprawl; at the time it wasn't.

TO: Your log forms are even microfilmed now. There's a log of them at Montgomery County being kept. Yes, very very helpful to all of us.

PS: And, you know, I always wanted to get them the best equipment. Like I said, I was still an advocate of microfilm and I know you are still. It's just produced differently. And, I mean, that was something that was difficult to explain to the non-believers in terms of paying for microfilm too just because it wasn't cheap. And we had to do 35-millimeter and 60-millimeter so to have all these different cameras and scanners and—it was intimidating, it was overwhelming, it was costly. So, you know, from every place in the county there was excitement and there was fear.

JC: Yeah.

TO: So with you being a advocate for technological changes, was there a big difference in the technology utilized at the beginning versus the end of your time here?

PS: Yes. So I wanted to bring document management to Warren County. So I introduced Gary Browning (*former IT department head*) to the application that they ended up buying which is OnBase. I don't know if they're still using it.

JC: We still do.

PS: Okay well that was because of me. And I had nothing to do with its installation. I didn't even use it. But I brought OnBase to Warren County.

JC: And there are definitely- there are departments that still utilize it, a lot of departments under the commissioners. We use that for a lot of our—so anything that we have in our indexing, our documents, our images, the marriage records that we have online, the OCP estates that are all online now—we utilize it for our document management solution. And at some point, we might utilize other things that are out there but for that type of stuff it works great. You know, it's practical- it's not great for every single thing we have but for what we need in terms of that, it works great.

PS: So one of the big transitions for creating records retention schedules was taking into account the existence of electronic records. That was a big, big transition. And I thought that we covered that pretty well especially in the general retention schedule. The county administrator wanted that general retention schedule so we put it on the fast track. But yeah, it took a lot of wordsmithing so that everyone could understand their responsibilities in terms of how they handled the records and then that we would have some responsibilities as well once it had reached- the records had reached a certain point in their lives. I mean, you know, people were grateful when we would do big purges or whatever. One of the things was working with vendors and the shredder people and the box people...

TIME 01:05:00 MARK

PS: It was all interesting but it took a lot of my time because it was all brand new.

JC: Yeah. It still takes a lot of my time ... I totally understand.

TO: So at what point did some of the microfilm staff begin to somewhat start transitioning to more of an archival aspect, like Pat Grove we know used to clearly be part of the microfilm department. But by the end she seemed to be not doing as much microfilm as archival work.

PS: Yes. So the space was designed to have a reception desk – the reading room. And Pat came to me right away and said “I'm interested in that position” and I said “wonderful, you'd be great at it.” She and Jana Jones had never been separated in the workspace before. It was very difficult for them. They were sad, they missed each other and, you know, eventually I think Jana – I hope – that she enjoyed her

position as supervisor which I guess Pat had been considered it, even though there were only two of them prior to establishing the records center. Does that—?

TO: I think that answers the question very well. So how often did you – as well as the department – interact with the public?

PS: We primarily were working with the genealogists or anyone who came down to do research, and people came from all places in the world to do research. We also received requests by- electronic requests and snail-mail requests, so occasionally I would go to where records were stored to do the research. Or I would give it to Pat Womack (*former archives employee*) who was eventually stationed over there as I mentioned in the various locations. But our interaction with the public was primarily those doing genealogical research. Occasionally we had Warren County employees coming down here doing research for their own bosses. And then we were always giving tours. Everybody wanted to see our facility and so people came from all over Ohio.

TO: Did you have- was it like a regular occurrence like patrons every day, every week?

PS: Well we did host the Miami Valley Archives Roundtable on more than one occasion. So we didn't have a steady stream of people visiting but if any of the professional organizations was looking for a field trip, they would come here. But we also had individuals visiting from private archives, and now I have to tell you this story before I forget: Nine-eleven – has anyone spoken to you about 9/11?

JC: Well we were- not really-

TO: We weren't quite certain because we talked about this not that long ago.

JC: I don't think anyone has talked—we haven't had an oral history about that or—nobody has discussed it. But I know when Pat was still here, she would tell me like the blockades that they had and security was much different—obviously it was twenty years ago so things are different. But no, I don't think anyone has gone in-depth of it.

PS: Oh my goodness, I was looking at the time. So my personal experience is that as we were working down here in the basement, we didn't have access to television or radio. No cell phones, I mean that wasn't a thing if you can believe that.

TIME 01:10:00

PS: So, someone came down from the Recorder's Office and said "You guys, they're bombing New York. I think we might be at war." And we were in disbelief. "What??" We went on the internet to see what

was happening and learned about the World Trade Center attack and there was—I was expecting guests from the Marianist Archives that day. And so one of the fathers and one of my former employees arrived just after the attacks had occurred, and I said “you know, we’re all really upset. We’re all in a state of shock. We- we don’t know what’s going on, should we hide, should we— And so I will understand if you do not want to have lunch.” And the father said “oh no, I want to have lunch.” So I went to The Golden Lamb on 9/11 and I was miserable. And what was I supposed to do, I was hosting them.

PS: And when I got back there was an emergency meeting called for elected officials and department heads, and we all met in the commissioners’ public meeting room upstairs. And we talked about what would need to happen if things got worse – if things came to our door. And we talked about the elected officials being protected and meals ready-to-eat, MRE’s available for them, sandbags and things like that. And I remember I raised my hand because I was never afraid! A room full of county people and elected officials and I raised my hand. And I said “Can you help me understand more about the emergency preparations that are in place for us?” And Jake Jones said “oh not for you” (*laughter*) “dear, these things are not in place for you.” And I said “no, I just want to understand, you know, I just want to understand.” Because any disaster preparedness is our responsibility, that’s all.

TO: This kind of goes in a similar vein not so much memorable events, but are there memorable projects that you helped with over the years besides clearly making the transition to the records center?

PS: Sure. Well, going digital. Bringing in the document management software. Preparing the time capsule for the bicentennial. Well I remember bringing my daughter in because we were working such late hours. She was just a baby and I had- I arranged for childcare in the neighborhood here with an elderly woman who was running a little nursery school out of her home. So my daughter was an infant and she said “sure I’ll take her” and I would go over there every day at lunch and nurse her. And I was using my breast pump in my office. And so that was probably—It might have been something fairly new happening around here (*laughter*).

TO: Probably.

JC: I think yes.

PS: I have a picture that I’ll share with you of my daughter. I was trying to entertain her. She’s on the floor – she’s just a baby! And, you know, she’s playing with a little mat thing, a children’s toy, and I’m down on the floor with her and we stayed late. And I enjoyed those- those times ...

TIME 01:15:00 MARK

PS: ... I don't know if they did (*laughter*). But for me, it was fun. I loved working hard. You know, one of the things I did was I brought the display case into the lobby upstairs (*TO: Oh nice!*). The historic one, I don't know if you upgraded it to something new—

JC: It's still the same one that was—that was donated by maybe—I don't remember who—

PS: I'm trying to remember where it came from.

JC: But it's still the same one, yeah.

PS: Okay good, good. So I had that placed there. I'm just trying to remember little things that for me seemed like they're just memories but you're not aware of them—maybe as we keep talking, I know we have a little more time.

TO: Yes. It is 10:38 currently. Well, do you- is there anybody who you worked with – be it a coworker, a manager – someone else involved in the county who made a impact on you while you were here?

PS: Absolutely – absolutely. My boss Beth Deckard, the Warren County Recorder. And Pat South, the Warren County Commissioner. They were two of the smartest, toughest, strongest women around. And I learned so much and to this day we keep in touch (*JC: That's great*). Yeah...

JC: I did not have the pleasure to work with Beth. I met her sister once, she came downstairs for something the first year I worked here. But I got to work with Pat the last three, four years that she was a commissioner and she...

PS: She's wonderful.

TO: She is.

JC: She still—I don't think this department would be what it was if it wasn't for her.

PS: And I have to mention Edna Bowyer because, our namesake, she was here a lot. She was the Recorder before Beth. So she was responsible for a lot of the preservation and for whatever organization in any way you found it you couldn't ... you can falter for that, there was no solution other than to stack things up. But it was a pleasure to get to know Edna and I will say that she was a dynamo,

may she rest in peace. She was a Kentucky Colonel and she wore that baseball cap in here very proudly as she should and I tended her funeral and I cried like a baby. And I was so, so thrilled that Beth wanted to dedicate the records center in her name. So we installed that placard outside the records center door. Edna was uncomfortable naming the records center for herself because she was living. And that was the joke she made – “Aren’t you supposed to do that when I’m dead!” (*laughter*)

JC: I think I’ve heard that joke!

TO: That’s phenomenal. So you took a tour of our facility earlier and (*indecipherable*). So how do you think the records center has changed over the years, be it while you were here or now (*indecipherable*)...

PS: It still smells the same (*laughter*). It smells like cardboard and old books and, you know, you gotta love it. It’s like perfume. And I was very, very impressed to see the exhibits. That was something that we started while I was here. I really wanted to identify the old artifacts that I found around the county as things we could showcase down here so when you see like the gas can, or the Recorder’s cash register, or I know there’s a few things—to use one of the old probate estate cubby shelves as a decorative piece, I was like “oh, let’s give it a little charm!” But what has changed is a lot and I’m impressed and I’m happy to see it. I’m happy for the people who live in this county. And what you’re doing in terms of outreach education, working with kids—there’s nothing more important than teaching students how to do research and not to be afraid.

TIME 01:20:00 MARK

PS: Where I work now at Sinclair, I watch the librarians do that. It’s their job to teach students how to conduct research. So you’re doing very important work in that regard and I think it’s wonderful that you have acquired the original space that you were intended to have as God intended it. And that was- that was hard when that space was taken away from us. I felt like it was being taken away from me! But the new area for the microfilm department is just fantastic, and to walk into a microfilm department and not see any cameras is absolutely incredible.

TO: Well that’s great to hear, so—

PS: It’s also a pleasure to meet both of you and it’s good to be here. I’m very honored that you asked me to come talk about my experience here. If there’s ever anything you want to ask me whether it’s on digital file or not just call me, text me, message me. I don’t care.

TO: We love people who are willing to share experiences and knowledge and just help enhance the records center even to more of what it can be. So you’ve answered all of our questions regarding the department as a whole and your background, so we can work on answering some more county-specific questions if you have time, or until we run out of time if that is okay with you. Or we can stop now.

PS: We have about fifteen minutes, I'm so sorry, I have to be at work at 11:30.

TO: No no, this is phenomenal, we are thankful for all information we can get. So, one thing that was very specific for you being here, you were one of the very-first female department heads and directors for a department within the county, so what was that experience like being a female in power?

PS: Well sometimes word would come back to me that people were supposed to take what I said with a grain of salt and that was coming from other department heads, men specifically. And, you know, we value everyone in the workplace, at least we do today. I think I was valued very much. But as I said, I raised my hand, I would go and confront anybody who had something to say about me. One time a couple of Building Services (*now Facilities Management*) workers came over to my office as it was in the old jail on Silver Street. And when I explained my position on something I needed and they said "we don't want to do it that way" and I said "you gotta do it that way." They said to me "what, do you have a case of the Jewish cramps?" And I said "Excuse me? What? I'm not familiar with that expression, could you explain it to me what that means?" And, you know, they were back-peddling and I said "perhaps you don't know that I'm Jewish or maybe you do" is what I said. And I told the county Recorder and she told the commissioners and those guys were not let go which is fine; I didn't want them to lose their jobs, but later they were fired because they were just rotten. And they had been doing something that was not acceptable in terms of harassing women. So yeah, being— I was told I was the first Jewish employee here.

JC: I would not have been surprised by that at all.

PS: I'm not so sure because Judge Bronson (*Neil Bronson, former common pleas judge*) is Jewish, at least that was my understanding. And maybe he didn't—you know, his work came first, I don't know. Have you ever heard that?

JC: I think the big thing might be the word 'he' in that as opposed to 'she.'

TIME 01:25:00 MARK

PS: Oh, sure sure sure. So once I got a phone call—once other Jewish people were being hired, I got a call- there was someone being hired in the Prosecutor's office and they wanted to know what my standard was for the Jewish holidays, how we did that was it. Holiday time – was it personal time, what kind of... And I said well you know- I already know how to respond and I'm going to refer you to the Jewish Community Relations Council because they have all the literature, all the information you need to make policy-made decisions because one thing that you learn right away as a member of minority is that your- your practice, your procedure, your standard should never make anybody else's policy. And so that was how we took care of that. You know, I ... I don't know if I should go into some of these things. But my staff had a lot of trouble with the things that I allowed and didn't allow in the office. And I

know that once I left, they went ham – which is a great word to use when we’re talking about— Yeah, I mean I know that even people who were let go were brought back. And that’s fine because, you know, I’m proud of what I accomplished. I’m proud of the time that I served. And I always conducted myself professionally and fairly, and I expected professionalism from the people around me. And when I didn’t get it, I called them out on it – maybe that’s not how I should end this interview.

TO: Well then, we’ll ask another question.....

JC: Well I think also ... I really try to have things in perspective of the times. And so I can easily say “well that can never happen now because we’re looking at something in a 2022 lens.” So I have hope and faith that if you were... if I was the person that would have been the individual in your role back in the early- or mid-late nineties, I’m sure there would have been things thrown in my face that would have happened just because of the times.

PS: And it wasn’t just the times if I may interrupt...

JC: Sure.

PS: It was the rural location...

JC: Yes. And that too.

PS: Because none of those things would have happened even in Dayton or Montgomery County. I shouldn’t say none of them. But, I mean, when I tell you that the county administrator was my friend at Montgomery County, she’s also Jewish so I knew that sort of thing wasn’t happening there. So, things have changed.

TO: What advice would you give current Warren County employees as a whole? Like, what did you learn over your time that is important but is also then- advice you’ve give for change or for better things?

PS: I really hope that new employees are taken through an orientation in terms of records management.

JC: We have a ... everyone, well ... Of course the department head- or, the elected officials- it’s up to them on what’s mandatory and what’s not. But if you are under the Commissioners Office, you have to

take a twelve- to fifteen-minute video that has a couple quizzes in it that is on the- that everyone has to take as part of their personnel packet that talks about the basics of records management.

PS: There you go. So that I think is crucial because you need to get people to understand their responsibilities up front. So yeah, I think that I would- I would like employees here to come down and use the facility and enjoy it and be proud of their history. And I guess I would like to see- after the pandemic of course – I would like to see ... well I don't know, maybe this is happening now ... but more communication among departments in a social way.

TIME 01:30:00 MARK

PS: I think that was really lacking. We just didn't get to know people. I mean, there used to be a big potluck and that was stopped in its tracks once somebody got sick or I don't know what it was. It was fun. There used to be a big – maybe they still do this too – there was a big party out on the courthouse lawn for all of the employees of the courts. Anybody – anyone who came from any other institution, agency, and anybody was welcome to participate in this day of food and drink and revelry and—

JC: There's still some things that they do. If I remember correctly, maybe there was one time when I first started that they had kind of like a potlucky type thing that really hasn't happened now that ... each department's ... it's weird because it's almost like you have all these small little businesses within the county because each government agency kind of does their own thing (as long as) it's in their budget and elected official wants so, in some ways—

PS: Absolutely. It's like little fiefdoms...

JC: So we have a little bit of that and they do a golf outing that people come participate in. They do the golf scramble and then like- I think it's the-

TO: The Bar Association.

JC: The Bar Association ... they do an ice cream social ... mobile ice cream truck ...

PS: Oh nice!

JC: They do those kind of things. I know recently they sent out a document (saying) what can ... the commissioners did ... what can we do for our employees to make us better and, you know, that kind of thing. And I had mentioned on there that social aspect ... You sleep, you work, and then you have eight hours to spend with your family day. So like that kind of like- having that social pool I think is important.

You don't have to be best friends with everyone (*indecipherable*) ...your management or not. But having that interaction I think is important too.

PS: Sure, take everybody to Kings Island! As long as everybody sits down and breaks bread together (*indecipherable*)...

TO: So one last thing to ask you so that we can get you on your way to make it to work. Is there any additional information that you'd like to share with or leave on for our interview today?

PS: I think this records center and archives is still, and if not more so, a beacon to the state and to the nation. We've done a lot of things while I was here, you've done a lot more and you should be very, very proud. Looks great.

TO: Well on that note, Pam, we thank you so much for coming to the Warren County Records Center again today to talk with us and we will end the interview here. Thank you so much.

PS: It was my pleasure.

[End transcription 01:33:21]