

Edward 'Ted' Hitchens – Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: **Edward Hitchens**

Interviewers: **Jacob Stickel** (archival specialist), **Tori Otten** (assistant archivist)

Date of Interview: 9 August 2023

List of Initials: EH = Edward Hitchens, JS = Jacob Stickel, TO = Tori Otten

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

Transcriber: Keegan Kiley (records center support)

[Begin transcription 00:00:01]

JS: Okay. My name is Jacob Stickel, I am the archival specialist here at Warren County for the oral history program. I am here with my colleague...

TO: Tori Otten, assistant archivist.

JS: And we are interviewing...

EH: Ted Hitchens.

JS: Okay. Today is Wednesday August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023. And we're gonna start off with some general background questions. So, you already answered what your name is so tell us about your early life. So where did you grow up, where did you go to school?

EH: So, I grew up in Cincinnati (Ohio). I went to Sycamore School since I was about eight years old. Graduated from Sycamore in 1995. Go aviators! And after which I went into the military for a few years and went to college immediately there after. Went to University of Cincinnati, I got my bachelor's degree in criminal justice in 2005 and master's degree in criminal justice from Xavier University in 2012. Yeah, but I was working here during the time during grad school.

JS: Alright! And that goes into did you go to post secondary school? You mentioned.

EH: Like after college? Yeah, after grad school I went to- I started grad school about five years after my undergrad.

TO: So, in that case, during or after your college degrees what jobs did you have prior to working for Warren County?

EH: I just worked part-time in retail after the military. Just to get through school, just to cover what the G.I. bill didn't cover.

JS: Alright- I didn't mean to interrupt; did you have anything more?

EH: No, not really. I enlisted in the navy after high school. I was stationed on a carrier, outta Norfolk (Virginia).

TO: Which carrier?

EH: Enterprise!

TO: Ah! Okay, thank you.

JS: Alright, next is the next set of questions. It is departmental questions, so how did you end up working for Warren County?

EH: So, I originally applied in summer of '06 and Pam Shwartz I believe was the records manager at the time. Ended up giving the position to another applicant, you know just the way it goes. And then fast forward about nine months, spring of '07, she calls me back and offered me the same job. I guess they were doing some rearranging here at the office at the time. So yeah I accepted the position and been here since!

JS: Alright! Thank you and where did you work during your time?

EH: It was mainly here, here in the records center, right here in the lower level, the admin building.

JS: You mentioned the year that you started, and how long did you work officially so?

EH: So, it's been about sixteen and a half years now. I actually did part of my internship with Mary Haven Youth Center. This was like summer of 2011. So, beyond that!

TO: So, you already specified that the records center has always existed in the basement of the Warren County Administration building since you started here, but how is the location somewhat changed over the years?

EH: I guess just more stuff was stored over there at the time. I mean there are shelving units that are there that weren't there when I started. A lot of shelving units have been rearranged by me back there. I remember when I was first here what we know as Bay D you couldn't walk back there. It was completely filled up with destruction stuff- yeah. In my first day here there was a destruction. Oh yeah! And the first row of shelves were all filled, there were stuff on the floor, and there was boxes piled back on Bay D- of all different sizes! So yeah, that was a job. (TO: Dang!) (JS: Wow!) Hard to visualize nowadays. (TO: It really is!)

JS: Oh yeah and you mentioned that you were putting up some of these shelving units that we put our historical books on in the reading room, right?

**Time 00:05:00 Mark**

EH: No those were- I was mainly just realigning them just to look more even, look more uniform. I mean some of them were crooked, and some of them the books didn't really fit, I mean they were almost wedged in there. So, I just made it look more even, probably a lot better for the books too I imagine. It got noisy in there with the power tools but (JS: Oh yeah!) that's okay, it came out for the best!

JS: What were some of your daily tasks and duties?

EH: Mainly, delivering files to the other departments, and just keeping track of where things are, and being able to know how to file stuff quickly. My trainer at the time was former records manager James Zimmerlin and he showed me how to locate individual files, the location codes that we used to find files, and how to sign them out. We signed them on paper, so each individual file we had to write down the date, the file number, and you had to initial it. You take that with you, deliver the file and have the person you deliver it to initial it or have anybody initial it, oh yeah, we still gottem!

TO: Well in that regard we're digital now so what point do you remember going digital?

EH: Oh jeez 2012, 2013 we made the program on access. That I still refer to from time to time if a file comes back that was checked out forever ago and if predates the new system that was put up... god its been about a year now since the new ones been up, almost a year. (TO: Yeah!) Wow! (TO: Time flies!) Oh yeah. So, every now and then I refer back to it cause it goes back to about, I think the first deliveries with the access system were from like 2011? But we've had files come back that were checked out before I started working here. (TO: Wow!)

JS: What is something that people don't know about your position or role?

EH: That we have delivery schedules! I guess a lot of folks are just curious about how do you know where to find things, especially when they come visit the record center. We've had our share of visitors and such and people often impressed by- they come in here and see this huge warehouse, of these shelves, and you know all these boxes hold all these records and you know it's like "how do you find the one thing?", we've got tens of thousands of records in there. A Lot of folks don't know how the location codes were developed, and how that makes it so easy to find individual files, and most of the files are sorted by case number which helps a lot. Some of them are alphabetized and some of them are by date. But yeah, folks they seem impressed that they learn something- well show them a typical location code and how we find things back there. And I think a lot of other departments kinda modelled their storage after that.

TO: Definitely something to be proud of!

EH: Oh yeah!

JS: Yeah.

EH: Very handy! Even after all these years.

JS: And how often do you interact with the public?

EH: That's one of my favorite ones! Not very often, but I've had some memorable interactions and a lot of them were over the phone. Oh, what is some good ones here? I had a guy call one time; this was back when I use to do the genealogy request, and I had a guy call one time because he learned from another department, I'm guessing that we have his criminal records stored here and he wanted us to expunge it because he didn't want his wife to find out that he took her car. Because he insisted the car was in his name. (TO: Oh no!)

**Time 00:10:00 Mark**

EH: So, yeah, that was a fun one and I just informed him that your file had to be requested through the Clerk of Courts and he sounded- it took me awhile to convince him to do that, but about an hour later I got a request from them to deliver the file and I could not get it over there fast enough!

JS: On that, how much did your position change over time since you worked at Warren County? You mentioned you took genealogy request at one point.

EH: Yeah, and for a while there I was focusing exclusively on the deliveries and bring back new boxes because right around this time is when we got the access base system up and that had a feature where there was a table for files deliveries and a table for incoming boxes. Cause the regular logs, the paper logs that was just for files, we didn't have anything for box deliveries coming in going out. So, it was pretty important we keep track of that as well. So that's one thing that has changed, a good effective way to keep track of box deliveries, even if a box gets relocated to make room for other stuff. Cause a lot of challenges we've run into is a department would call they would say "I'm guessing we have about twenty boxes" I go over and I count there's like fifty. And another thing is one of the bigger challenges was a lot of departments didn't really know our regulations behind- it has to be in this particular box and we'd like it labelled because we don't know what's in these boxes. It's not our job to know that! I can't tell you how many times I would go to pick up boxes and "well we don't know what they are", if you don't know what they are then how do we know! We had to train departments to know exactly what the records had, could they be stored, and for how long. There was a transition period there for a while, cause we only have so much room for the departments. Clerk of Courts obviously is the biggest one that we service, they have their own bay. Whereas some of the departments they have a few rows. It's gotten significantly better over the years, the communication and what we can do, what they can do- it's always a process. I was around that learning curve!

TO: Okay.

JS: Are there coworkers, managers or others you worked with that had an impact on you?

EH: Oh, I can think of a couple right off the bat. Jana Wells, we all love Jana! I consider Jana my work mom. Jana, she worked for the county (Warren County) for awhile and then she left and came back. When I was first hired in '07 I had just missed her. (TO: Okay.) and she came in and visited a couple of times and then she came back to us- help me out here (TO: I think 2013 or 14.) 2014 yeah.

TO: She would've been here prior to May of 2014.

EH: Mm-hmm. Cause Jen Haney was our records manager when she came back. (TO: Which was May 2013 she was hired.) Something like that yeah (TO: Yeah.). Jana never worked here when James Zimmerlin (TO: Okay!) was the manager. But at any rate Jana was wonderful because she had already been familiar with the county working here and the culture... she was just so warm, so funny. A very understanding person and just good to laugh with, just a good person to have around. I would say the other is Jenifer Baker. And the one thing I loved about Jenifer was she was very patient. With me

especially, there was something I couldn't find- cause I've always been a hands on person, as my wife will tell you, you can explain something to me and explain it, explain it, but I have to see it, once I see it (snaps fingers). And Jenifer was always good about showing me things.

**Time 00:15:00 Mark**

EH: She was always a good resource to have. She never got irritated or anything if I keep getting confused on stuff. So yeah, I would say those two come to mind- Jana Wells and Jenifer Baker (TO: Absolutely!) god love em!

TO: So similarly, are there any memorable projects you helped with over the years? Maybe with one or both of them?

EH: A fun one that Jenifer and I did was the prohibition exhibit. That was neat because we actually found a couple of the old court cases that dealt with that when that was going on. We had a really neat display up in the display cabinet. I got to bring in some things from home, I have a couple empty beer bottles from some of the Cincinnati (Ohio) distilleries that were shut because of prohibition. I'm such a sucker for old things like that, things that tell a story. And another neat project I did was one of the county's earlier judges Francis Dunn Leiby. That was a neat project to do! It was neat to see his cases he presided over, we actually have his will and estate stored here. He was a revolutionary war veteran and one of the first educators in the area. So, it was neat to learn about that. I also worked with Jenifer on an area known as Foster's Crossing (Fosters, Ohio) near present day Maineville (Ohio). Are you familiar with this area? It's where what is now Montgomery Road. (TO: Mm-hmm, yeah.) Probably southeast of here. That was pretty neat history (TO: Yeah!) around those areas. Yeah, those were some fun projects.

TO: Nice!

JS: What collection of records is your favorite?

EH: Oh jeez, I've always liked those two big maps! I think those are probably the most popular anyway. (TO: Yes!) But they're still accurate to today, I mean even the topography of the county looks a lot like what those maps show. It's interesting to see an old map like that with familiar places. So, I always thought those were pretty neat.

TO: Well going back a bit to your memorable projects you spoke on exhibits, did you work on any exhibits other than those three? I believe you helped with the new auditors' exhibit.

EH: The new auditors' exhibit. I briefly helped with the exhibit, I think it's still upstairs, about the old Peters Cartridge factory! (TO: Yes!) That was neat. Cause I go bicycling a lot (TO: Yeah!) and I go right by it. Yeah, it's now Cartridge Brewing. But that was a neat history behind that place. I think one of your first interviews was a gentleman who was one of the first police officers of Hamilton Township (Ohio). (TO: That would be Clyde Baston.) Clyde Baston yeah! (TO: Yes!) I remember him talking about one of the explosions that happened there and he responded to it. (TO: Yeah.) So that was neat to do the project on that.

TO: Well, if you had to choose, which of those exhibits you helped with would be your favorite?

EH: I would say the prohibition one. (TO: Prohibition.) Yeah. Cause it's a period that everybody is familiar with. I don't think there's a part of the country that wasn't affected by that in some way. And Warren County (Ohio) being no exception.

JS: What have been some of your biggest challenges working at the Records Center?

EH: Weather! No, just sometimes we'd get a call from another department, it could be a judge or elected official, they need a file right away and of course if it's a judge you need to expedite that as soon as possible. Sometimes when we would get our new digital inventory system, the access one that is...

**Time 00:20:00 Mark**

...sometimes you would open a box for a file and it's not there, its missing, like our new system would tell us if something is missing. That's what I like about the new one, it tells you in real time if something is missing or not whereas the access form, it's handy, it's a digital form of the paper version, but if something was already missing that could be challenging. So, I guess just making sure things are delivered on time, especially if somebodies waiting for em. Nowadays a lot of departments run paperless so it's less of an issue nowadays. But yeah, it happens.

JS: Sure does! What has the Records Center & Archives taught you that you weren't anticipating?

EH: I guess a new way to keep things organized. Different things, I wasn't anticipating that there was more than one way to store things like the books, and categorizing the files, and just to keep up with retention schedules. Things that can be destroyed now versus in six months versus fifty years and that can change so much. I remember destruction periods where the day before the destruction we would get a notice from the state that we can't destroy these just yet, we have to keep these for another year. The truck is on the way, they're pulling down the loading dock right now and we just got the notice we

can't destroy these records. So yeah, it can be a lot to keep up with, that's something that's challenging that you don't quite anticipate.

JS: No certainly not. And then we're going into the more Warren County general questions. What are some of your highlights of your time with the county?

EH: I guess just the friends I made over the years, just getting to know people and hanging out with their families. It's always surprising where you meet a colleague here and they have small children and it just seems like very briefly later "how's your little girl doing?" "Oh, she's starting college this year" it's like wait what! You know! I still get asked today "how's that little baby doing?" well that little baby's about to start first grade. So, it makes you feel like part of a community in a sense. When you get to know folks like that, they can open up to you and you know every bodies families, pets, we're all about pets here, all about our pets! So yeah, that's always a nice highlight when you get to make friends like that. (TO: Absolutely!)

JS: What was the county like when you started versus now?

EH: It got bigger! Population-wise that is. What use to be just small rural areas have really expanded I mean even just right here in Lebanon (Ohio) has changed a lot and I think for the better. I mean there were hits and misses. But when I started here, you go out to Monroe (Ohio), Miami Valley Gaming that wasn't there, all the shopping centers by that weren't there, there was Traders World and that was it. So yeah, and Mason (Ohio) is just exploding yeah. So, the county was still when I first got here a rural area, and in some areas it still is, but it's really really expanding you know it's impressive really.

JS: Did anything significant happen within the county government during your time as an employee?

EH: I guess nothing earth shattering, I remember when former prosecutor Rachel Hutzel she passed away and I remember that.

**Time 00:25:00 Mark**

And I'm just happy to hear folks retiring, bummed cause I love being with them, working with them but happy for them. So, I guess nothing huge but you get attached to somebody and they move onto something, they retire and go somewhere else.

TO: What was Covid like during your time here?



EH: Oh gosh. Ties on with the previous question. It seemed like a matter of minutes everything just shut down right away. So, we were home for weeks at a time. The first couple of weeks we would just work for a couple of hours and then later on we would do a full day, work a full day from home. I guess for my wife and I it was a silver lining in a sense that our son was three and he was still in daycare so he wasn't affected by some of the schools that were shut down. But still it was interesting toggling trying to get work done and keep a three year old entertained and two cats and a dog. The cat who liked to take a nap on the computer keyboard. (TO: Of course.) Of course. But like everywhere else covid shook up a lot of things. Working from home changed the culture in general; I think somebody you guys interviewed from upstairs mentioned the title examiners. We used to see them all the time, I have not seen one of them since covid. And yeah, that would be a very significant thing. (TO: Absolutely.)

TO: So, what are some of the most important things you learned from working for Warren County in general?

EH: I guess just exercise patience; somebody needs things right away you learn to prioritize like "imma deliver these records over here first and then I'll get to these". I've learned to consolidate tasks better. I'll combine box deliveries and file deliveries so if I'm loading up a bunch of boxes or a bunch of empty boxes to take to another department "well the department next door needs this file, so I'll take this file too," and try to do everything at once. I apply that at home a lot too. (TO: Hey, it works!)

JS: It sure does. What are you going to miss most about working for the county?

EH: I just think first and foremost the people. It was hard to tell some folks "Hey my last days coming up". I'll miss being able to walk around a lot cause I like to stay mobile. I don't like staying, standing or sitting in one place for a long time. So, it's nice to get around and that allows me to see everybody. See everybody, check in on everybody. So yeah, definitely miss that.

JS: What advice do you have to give to current and future Warren County employees?

EH: Be mindful of the fact that there's a lot of folks who have been here a long time that are very hesitant about change. This is an area that when I first started people here were very resistant to change, and it's gotten better over the years but sometimes change comes gradually or sometimes it's like covid, change'll hit ya like a ton of bricks. Some people meet with that easier than others you just gotta be patient and take things one day at a time.

JS: Well do you have any additional information we haven't covered during this interview that you'd like to share?

**Time 00:30:00 Mark**

EH: No not off hand- I remember the first delivery vehicle we had. (TO: Oh no.) One of the tires kept getting low. (TO: She was a beauty!) Yeah, I miss that car. Yeah, I got a flat tire one time I was in Deerfield Park (Maineville, Ohio) cause I was taking back a whole bunch of- cause titles offices used to have satellite offices near right off of Tylersville Road (Ohio) and I had a flat tire out there one time. So now even today on our new car I still look at the tires, make sure the tires aren't going flat. Check the tires! (TO: The biggest advice you can give someone, check the tires!) (JS: Goes with the last question of giving advice to employees.) Know more than one way into the common pleas building because sometimes I would deliver a criminal file of- it could be a murder case and the guys up for parole or something and I've come up there with the murder case and if it's a big case like that so there's gonna be boxes of it so you go in there, here's the family of the victim of the one side over here and over here you got the family of the guy up for parole so I'm just like "imma go in back here". I don't want to walk through here, news crews and all. I've not been approached by the press. Almost have a couple of times but I was like ehhhh no. (TO: Please stay away. Okay.)

JS: Alright well if there's not anything else then that concludes... (EH: Not off the top of my head.)

Alrighty then this concludes the interview thank you for coming Ted.

[End transcript 00:32:29]