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# Documentation of Arizona's history

## State Archives' collection holds artifacts from mundane to odd

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The state Constitution, the document upon which Arizona government is based, is a letdown to many first-time viewers.

Not because of what it says, but because of how it looks.

Arizona's founding fathers forsook the flowing, elegant handwriting that comes to mind with the U.S. Constitution and set forth the state's guiding principles on . . . a typewriter.

"It was cutting-edge technology," state archivist Melanie Sturgeon said of the 1910 document.

The typewritten Constitution is one of a myriad of objects, documents and items in the State Archives, which is observing its 70th anniversary this year.

The collection includes the usual documents that track government activity.

The records from the secretary of the territory are the most-requested items, Sturgeon said: election registers, oaths of office, accounts of protests and court records.

"Most people looking here are looking for historical research," she said.

The territorial criminal cases are popular with authors, graduate students and historians.

But the archives also houses oddball items that paint a quirky picture of the state's history: leather scraps emblazoned with cattle brands, a hatchet from a murder case, invitations to hangings.

A man named Phocion R. Way kept a diary that chronicled his cross-country trip from Cincinnati to the West Coast. Undertaken in 1858, it is a pre-Civil War glimpse of the Arizona Territory, complete with detailed pencil sketches of such things as the stagecoach on which he traveled, the rocky confines of a place called Doubtful Pass and a rendering of the desert environs of "our first camp at Santa Rita."

Detailed drawings are plentiful in the archives: One of the prize possessions is the daily prison diary, kept by inmates to log activities. At least one inmate adorned the pages with meticulous drawings of quills, swords and horseshoes.

Tucked into a box is the hatchet that Granville W. Johnson used in May 1926 to murder his wife of nearly four months. Records - available on microfilm in the archives - show that Johnson, his wife, Hazel, and her toddler son from a previous marriage were traveling from California to Missouri to visit his family when they stopped outside Williams at the Mountain Springs Ranch.

Late that night, Hazel was found in a blood-soaked bed. Her husband denied being involved, but investigators found an ax in the woods nearby - with his name and hometown of Los Angeles written on the handle - and Johnson's alibi quickly fell apart. When detectives learned of the four insurance policies he had taken out on his wife, his fate was sealed.

The ax later, came to State Archives after the court case concluded. The case file included a photo of Hazel with her young son, Robert. Years later, it proved to be a valuable link to their descendants as it was the only photo Hazel's great-granddaughter had of the two.

For all the items stored in the archives' cramped quarters (a new building is under construction and scheduled for completion next May), many records are lost to history.

Anything dealing with Wyatt Earp tends to disappear, Sturgeon said.

There's a big black market for memorabilia dealing with the participant in the shootout at O.K. Corral, she said.

Records from territorial governors are also spotty. "I would love to have those," she said with a sigh.

Even some contemporary records are less than complete. The archives has been trying to obtain records from the administration of Fife Symington, who left office just a decade ago, but Symington and his former staffers say they don't know where the records went.

Sturgeon said the collection welcomes anything that is a permanent record of Arizona history. But the state doesn't pay for the items, which has hindered some acquisitions.

"If someone comes in and says, 'My grandfather was a former state legislator, would you like his papers?' we always say yes," she said.