



## **VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: MEET ADAM PRESSWOOD**

During the fall semester of my undergraduate experience at Washington University in St. Louis, one of my instructors told me that the Missouri History Museum was seeking volunteers. That was in 2017. I was majoring in history, and I was looking for ways to connect with the museum world in the St. Louis area, which had been difficult up until then, given that I lived in rural Lincoln County, Missouri, and had no St. Louis roots or connections. I interviewed the following week, and began volunteering almost immediately. Throughout the remainder of that semester, I spent nearly three days per week in the galleries, though I was notorious for forgetting to log my time! I spent even more time at the museum during my final semester, which took place during the spring of 2018, and I practically lived at the museum throughout the summer of 2018 as well. Unfortunately, the demands of graduate school, which I began at UMSL in the fall of 2018, dramatically reduced the amount of time that I was able to devote to volunteering. By the fall of 2019, I was averaging one day per month, if I was lucky.

During my time as a volunteer, what I enjoyed most were the conversations that I was privileged to have with visitors and with other docents. I also appreciated the many opportunities that I had to “be a visitor in my own museum.” That was a phrase that docents used a lot back when I first started volunteering. Touring the galleries when times were slow and taking the time to read each and every label and text panel was sort of like sitting down with a book. Each time I was able to do that, I found that my abilities as a docent were stronger during my next tour with actual visitors.

I don't really have a personal or family connection with the museum. The closest I can come is the fact that my mother's fifth grade teacher became a docent there after her retirement, so we used to come in and visit the museum and her teacher when my siblings and I were all very young.

Prior to my studies at Washington University, my favorite area of historical focus was the 1960s, particularly the JFK administration. However, I was also interested in the civil rights struggles of that decade, as well as the Vietnam War and the protests that came along with it. In addition, I was an avid reader of all things related to the campaign and assassination of Bobby Kennedy. Oddly enough, however, my first three classes at Washington University dealt with the Holocaust, an area of history that I had never really focused on. It didn't take long before I was hooked, and that became a new area of interest for me. Before leaving Washington University, I completed an undergraduate honors thesis that explored the relationship between FDR and Churchill. In the fall of 2018, I began pursuing an MA in history and a certification in museum studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. As a graduate student, I had little time to focus on anything but school, which meant that most of my actual historical interests had to wait on the back burner. While sheltering in place during Covid-19, and since graduating from UMSL, I have found a little more time to pick them up, but I hope to return to them more consistently in the very near future. During my final semester at UMSL, I completed an independent study which focused on the behavior of Hitler and Stalin toward civilian populations in Europe during WWII. As soon as time allows, I look forward to combining this work with my undergraduate thesis and finally getting published - one of my biggest goals!

At this point, I am single and I don't have any children, although I look forward to changing at least the first of those realities as soon as possible. In the meantime, I have three nieces and a nephew who keep me very busy and burn through most of my money. I am a weightlifter, I love to write and to take photographs, and I enjoy reading and traveling. I also like to dance, and I enjoy attending live theater events. Many of those hobbies suffered as a result of my graduate school schedule as well, but I hope to give them renewed attention in a post-pandemic world. In terms of the rest of my life, I am currently wrapping up an internship with the Missouri Humanities Council that I devote myself to several days per week. Evenings and weekends, at least under normal circumstances, are often spent working as event staff for the Ethical Society of St. Louis. I also volunteer as a docent at the Holocaust Museum and Learning Center in St. Louis. The latter responsibility is on hold due to a long-term construction project, but in the meantime I still serve on the museum's docent advisory board. With the time that remains, I enjoy meeting to discuss all things related to Sherlock Holmes with local groups such as The Parallel Case of St. Louis and the Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn.

For me, the opportunity to contribute to the MHS newsletter on a monthly basis has been a gift on two fronts. First of all, it allowed me to indulge my never-ending love for research and for writing, two things that I just don't get tired of. Secondly, I was finally able to contribute volunteer hours again, which I had not been able to do with any degree of regularity since shortly after graduate school began. While I still look forward to being back in the museum in real-time as soon as possible, I hope to continue contributing with my pen far into the future.