Profile: Sarah Simpkin

GIS and Geography Librarian
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario

Describe your early background:

I was born in St. John’s, NL and grew up in Rimouski, QC and Sackville, NS before moving to Ontario for university. I was a curious kid who spent a lot of time on the computer. In some respects, not much has changed.

What (or who) influenced you to pursue a career in libraries?

When I started my first library job as a student assistant at my alma mater, Trinity College in the University of Toronto, I had no inkling that I would still be working in libraries years later. In fact, it wasn’t until I began working at the Map and Data Library at U of T that I realized how big of an umbrella library work can be—it has been a fabulous opportunity to combine my interests in maps, GIS, computing, and digital projects. By the time I had finished my B.Sc. in Geography, I knew that I wanted to keep working in the field. I completed my MLIS at Western while working part-time in their Map and Data Centre. My supervisors from those years, Marcel Fortin at U of T and Cheryl Woods at Western, continue to be top-notch mentors.

Where are you working now, and what do you like best about your current job?

After a year or so of working contract jobs in public libraries, I started my current position as GIS and Geography Librarian at the University of Ottawa in 2013. I feel like I really lucked out job-wise. My current role is a nice mix of subject-specific reference, GIS software support, outreach, and map and airphoto digitization coordination. Our section of the library is filled with maps and atlases, and it’s a real treat to be surrounded by them all the time. Colleagues within my unit, the Geographic, Statistical, and Government Information Centre, often collaborate on projects. It’s nice to have their expertise and support.

What do you do for recreation?

I’m a big tinkerer, and tend to jump from project to project. Lately I’ve been interested in APIs and taught myself more about them by building a Twitter bot. I have a growing zine
collection. I've also recently acquired an analog synthesizer and have been making lots of bleepy noises with it. I haven't really mastered anything, but I do keep myself busy.

**Tell us about an interesting book or article you've read recently. What appealed to you about it?**

I've been thinking a lot lately about preserving born-digital materials. This article [http://journal.code4lib.org/articles/10015](http://journal.code4lib.org/articles/10015) by Corey Davis at the University of Victoria provides a nice overview of their experience archiving websites, including their rationale for doing so and the challenges they considered. I'm hopeful that more libraries will start similar projects.

If you're into the history of technology, you may also enjoy Jon Gertner's book *The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation*, released in 2012. It's a fascinating look into the people and workplace that fostered the development of all kinds of innovations in computing history, including transistors, lasers, information theory, Unix, the C programming language, and many telecommunications technologies.