

# A Users' Guide to

# Scribe

The online indexing tool of the  
Washington State Archives



The screenshot shows the Scribe login interface. On the left, there are input fields for 'Username' and 'Password', with 'Forgot Password' and 'Log In' buttons below them. On the right, under the heading 'What Is Scribe?', there is a paragraph: 'Scribe allows you to help the Washington State Archives transcribe records for public access. Create an account and help make public records accessible to people across the globe.' The phrase 'Create an account' is circled in red. Below the login fields is a quote: 'Study the past if you would define the future. — Confucius'. At the bottom, the 'Washington State Archives' logo and 'SAS Office of the Secretary of State' are visible.

<https://scribe.digitalarchives.wa.gov/>

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Note—There is a lot of information in this guide. To skip over the detailed instructions and history, [see p. 8 \(FAQs\)](#) for a quick reference guide of common problems.

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## What is Scribe?

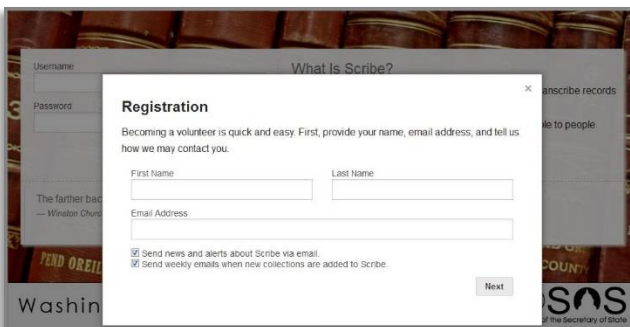
Scribe is an online digital application that allows users to become “honorary archivists” through the transcription and indexing of historically important records in Washington State. By using Scribe, volunteers are able to add information to the images, making them searchable online.

Scribe takes advantage of [crowdsourcing](#), which is “the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers.” In this instance, volunteers from around the globe create accounts in Scribe and have access to the ever-growing collection of digital images ready to be transcribed and indexed.

Each record can be viewed by many transcribers, but **two transcriptions must match exactly** before the record can become searchable. This guide walks through the process of setting up an account and provides standards that will facilitate matching accuracy and the success of the project.

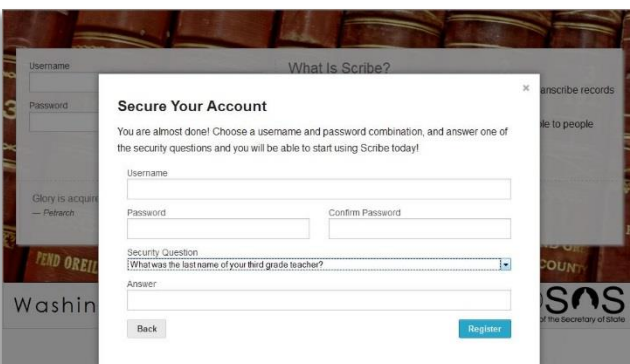
## Getting Started

**Step One:** Visit <https://scribe.digitalarchives.wa.gov/>. **(Note: older web browsers may have difficulties displaying Scribe properly. It is recommended that you use a current version.)** The first screen is displayed on the cover of this guide. Click on the link “Create an account”. You will be prompted with the following screen:

A screenshot of the Scribe registration form. The form is titled "Registration" and includes a sub-header "Becoming a volunteer is quick and easy. First, provide your name, email address, and tell us how we may contact you." The form contains fields for "First Name", "Last Name", and "Email Address". There are two checkboxes: "Send news and alerts about Scribe via email." and "Send weekly emails when new collections are added to Scribe." A "Next" button is located at the bottom right of the form.

**Step Two:** Enter your name and email address.

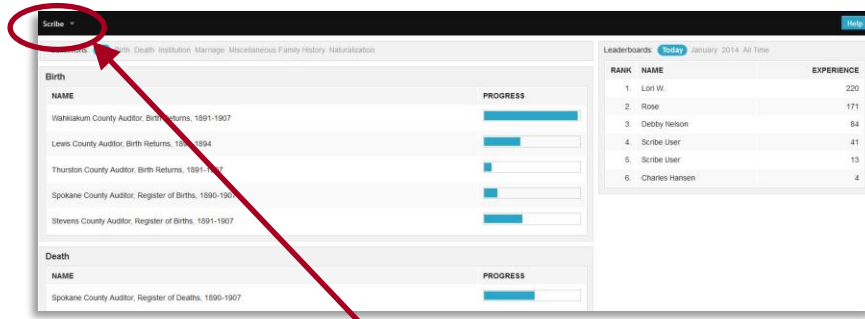
**Step Three:** Decide how you want your name to display in the indexed record.

A screenshot of the Scribe "Secure Your Account" form. The form is titled "Secure Your Account" and includes a sub-header "You are almost done! Choose a username and password combination, and answer one of the security questions and you will be able to start using Scribe today!". The form contains fields for "Username", "Password", and "Confirm Password". There is a "Security Question" dropdown menu with the question "What was the last name of your third grade teacher?". Below the dropdown is an "Answer" field. There are "Back" and "Register" buttons at the bottom of the form.

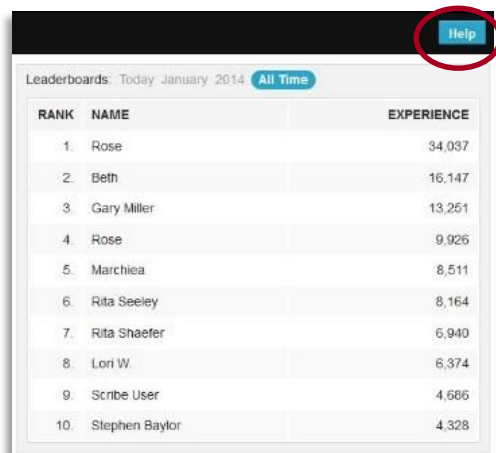
**Step Four:** Create a username and password, and also pick a security question from a drop down menu of choices. Once all fields are full—click the “Register” button and you are set to begin transcribing and indexing records!

## Working with Scribe

The homepage in Scribe is where you will find all the menus necessary to start your transcribing and indexing records. This is what you will see when you login:



In the dropdown menu on the upper left, you will find options for returning to the Home Page, changing Account Settings (Contact Details, Password), and logging out of Scribe.



In the upper right corner, you will find a Help button. The Help feature will walk you through the various controls on the homepage, providing information on what each feature offers.

You will also see the names and the number of records each user indexed that day, in the current month, current year, or of all time. Individuals who wish to remain anonymous appear as "Scribe User."

The home page is also where you will find the types of records available for transcription. Within each category, the records are typically broken down by county or city and then further by the recording agency (Auditor, Assessor, etc.) and then by type of record.



**Check back often! New records are added all the time.**

## Transcribing and Indexing a Record

Once you've selected the type of record you'd like to work with, you will see a scan of the actual document that needs indexing. In this instance, we're looking at Lewis County Auditor, Birth Returns, 1891-1894.

**BIRTH RETURN.**

1. Name of Child (s) *Wm. Arthur Cook*

2. Date of Birth *Dec 22 1893*

3. Place of Birth *Greenville Wash.*

4. Sex *Male*

5. Color (s) *White*

6. Afters or Sill-bers *None*

7. Legitimate or Illegitimate *Legitimate*

8. Mother's Maiden Name *Rosella Ella Bruce*

9. Mother's Age Last Birthday *19 years*

10. Color (s) *White*

11. No. of Child Bore to this Mother *One*

12. Mother's Birthplace (s) *Greenville Wash.*

13. Father's Name *H. A. Cook*

14. Father's Age Last Birthday *25 years*

15. Color (s) *White*

16. Father's Occupation *Farmer*

17. Father's Birthplace *Greenville Wash.*

State of Washington, County of *Lewis* ss.

I hereby certify that the above is a true return of the said birth, and of the other facts there reported.

Given at *Greenville*, Washington, this *24* day of *Jan*, 1900.

M. D. (4)

Note—(a) Give surname and Christian name, if child has been named.  
(b) Give race distinctly, as may be known, as White, Black, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Mixed White and Indian, etc.  
(c) Give State or foreign country, as naturally to family usage.  
(d) If reported by any other than Physician, sign as: Announcer, Parent, Cousin, etc.

The blank index form looks like this:

Append Finish Next Skip

**Child's First Name**

Child's Middle Name

**Child's Last Name**

Birth Date  Not Present

Child's Gender  
 Male  
 Female  
 Not Specified

**Father's First Name**

Father's Middle Name

**Father's Last Name**

Mother's First Name

Mother's Middle Name

**Mother's Maiden Name**

Cancel Save

**The bolded fields are required in order to proceed to the next record.** Scribe will prompt you to complete these fields before it will let you save your work.

## Rules for Transcribing in Scribe

There are many places to find rules and guidelines for indexing records, but the following rules must be used in order to obtain a match in transcriptions in Scribe. The main goal of Scribe is to help the researcher find the imaged document, which contains useful genealogical information, not to transcribe the whole record. For more information, see the [FAQ](#) page at the end of this guide.

- **Do NOT change information.** If you see Chas, Wm, or Jas, **Do NOT** write out Charles, William or James, etc. Write what is there.
- **Do NOT use punctuation.**
- **Do NOT use prefix titles such as Mr., Mrs. or honorary titles like Rev. or Dr.** When the first name of the wife is omitted, simply put in the husband's name.
- **Do NOT use professional titles like CPA, MD, or Esq.**
- **Do NOT add suffix titles such as Jr.**
- **Do NOT change spelling mistakes**
- **Do NOT key in all capital letters.** Proper capitalization should be used.
- **When required information is missing:**  
Because we need to have matching answers in order for the records to move on to the Digital Archives, please key in the word **blank** in any space where no information is provided. **Leave the space empty if the field is not required.**

## Deciphering Handwriting—Guidelines and Tips

- **Take your time.**
- **Examine letter samples.**  
A sample of some of the more commonly drawn letters in the alphabet is [here](#) for your convenience.
- **Utilize the zoom feature to help read the names.**  
These four buttons appear when the cursor is hovering anywhere on the screen. And when the cursor hovers over each one, a help feature will display, letting the user know what each button does:



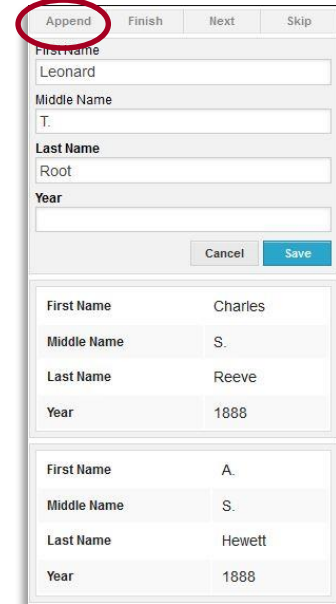
From left to right: Zoom In, Zoom Out, Home, Toggle Full Page

## Working with the Index Forms

Each form is unique to the type of record you are working with. For each record, required fields are in bold.

Within the indexing form, you have five action buttons available select. These are: **Save**, **Next**, **Append**, **Skip**, **Cancel** and **Finish**.

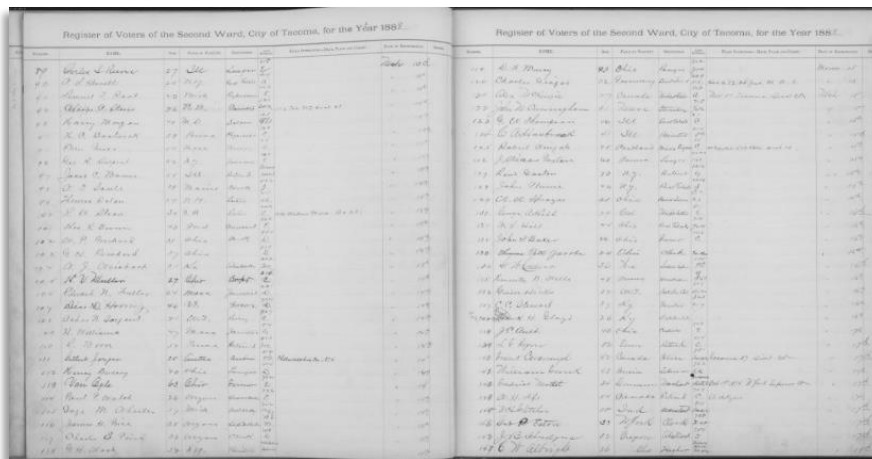
- **Save:** When you feel confident in your transcription, select **Save** to save your work. This will not remove the image. You can still edit your work at this point.
- **Next:** If there is only one name or entry for the image and you have reviewed it and are ready to move on, push select the **Next** button. This will bring up a new image in the same series.
- **Append:** If there are multiple entries per image select **Append** to **add another name or entry**. (See image below.) Names previously added are visible on the screen as you work. (See image on right.) Once all names have been added, Save your work and select either Finish or Next.
- **Finish:** To return to the Home Screen, click the **Finish** button.



Append		Finish	Next	Skip
First Name				
Leonard				
Middle Name				
T.				
Last Name				
Root				
Year				
Cancel		Save		

First Name	Charles
Middle Name	S.
Last Name	Reeve
Year	1888

First Name	A.
Middle Name	S.
Last Name	Hewett
Year	1888



- **Skip:** If the image is illegible, select **Skip** and it will move you on to the next record in the collection.
- **Cancel:** You can stop indexing at any point, by selecting **Cancel**.

Note: Once you have selected **Next**, **Finish**, or **Cancel**, you can't go back to images that you were working on. Incomplete indexes return to the list to be worked on by other Scribe users.

There are shortcuts for several of the buttons:

1. To **Append** a record = Hold down **Shift** and the **down arrow** on the keyboard.
2. To **Finish** indexing = Hold down **Shift** and the **up arrow** on the keyboard.
3. To go to the **Next** record or **Skip** = Hold down **Shift** and the **right arrow** on the keyboard.

As you work with Scribe, you will develop a system that works best for you.

Please let Historical Records Project staff know when you encounter anomalies so that we can make sure we're addressing problems or concerns as they arise. Call the HRP Coordinator for the Washington State Archives at (360) 586-2665 or by email at [hrp@sos.wa.gov](mailto:hrp@sos.wa.gov).



## Frequently Asked Questions and Troubleshooting Ideas

### 1. What do I do if an image is illegible or I can't read the information?

Click **Skip**. This will take you to the next available record for indexing. If there is just one field that is illegible, key the word **blank** if that field is required (displayed as bold), otherwise leave that space empty.

### 2. What do I do if a name is abbreviated? For example: Chas, Jas, Wm, etc.

No assumptions should be made when indexing records. Key names as you see them within the limitations of the [rules on page 5](#). For example, do not add punctuation, prefix titles, professional titles or suffix titles.

### 3. Can I return to a record that I was working on if I feel I've made a mistake?

You may continue to make changes to records until you have pressed the **Finish**, **Next** or **Cancel** buttons, at which point you can no longer return to that record.

### 4. What do I do if an image has multiple names to index, like a census or Polk Directory?

- **Step One:** Enter the information for the first name and then select **Save**.
- **Step Two:** Select the **Append** button at the top left of the index form.
- **Step Three:** Enter the information for the next name and select **Save**.
- **Step Four:** Repeat Steps One through Three for all additional names on the image.
- **Step Five:** Click **Next** to open a new image for indexing or **Finish** to exit to the Home Screen.

### 5. Why can't I add additional information like prefixes and suffixes?

Scribe's main purpose is to make the actual image to records available online. The program works when two transcriptions match exactly. Less information makes these matches more likely. All additional information is available to the researcher on the original image.

**Thank you for participating in Scribe!** Your help is invaluable! If at any point you have questions, suggestions, comments, or concerns, do not hesitate to contact the Historical Records Project Coordinator for the Washington State Archives at [hrp@sos.wa.gov](mailto:hrp@sos.wa.gov) or **(360) 586-2665**.

