

ARCHIVES GAZETTE



City of Seattle
Seattle Municipal Archives

Number 30 Winter 2009

Office of the City Clerk
Legislative Department

Message from the City Archivist

Archives, museums, and historical agencies are very good at marking anniversaries and commemorations; this falls well within their respective missions and/or core functions. These celebrations are wonderful opportunities for heritage organizations to showcase collections and engage the public in educational activities. In Seattle we have had various opportunities in recent years to engage in these activities:

- 2001 was the 150th anniversary of the landing of the Denny Party, the beginning of white settlement in what is now Seattle;
- 2007 marked the 100th anniversary of the annexation of several small towns to the City of Seattle, as well as the founding of several significant local businesses and institutions;
- We have just completed commemorating the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition;
- and institutions are already gearing up for the golden anniversary of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair.

One of the things I think we are not so good at, however, is celebrating our own milestones. At the Seattle Municipal Archives our mission is to document the history, functions, and actions of City government. Among those histories, functions, and actions is our own work, the work of the Archives program. And it is time to celebrate it.

The Archives will enjoy its 25th anniversary during the first quarter of 2010. A quarter century is no mean feat for a municipal archives. It is a good opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of staff who have made the program a success, the consistent support from City officials that has been invaluable in our growth, and the broad use of the records of City government. We will hold a celebration in March or early April; details will be forthcoming.

On a personal note, I am gratified to see where we are today; 25 years ago I could not imagine how well the program would develop. From a one person operation in 1985 originally funded with a two-year National Historical Publications and Records Commission grant, we are today a staff of six professional archivists and several volunteers and student workers. And the Office of the City Clerk also houses a City Records Management Program, the result, in great measure, of groundwork laid by the Archives program.

This is, indeed, something to celebrate. We look forward to all of you joining us in commemorating our 25 years and helping launch us into our next quarter century.

— Scott Cline, City Archivist

A City at Work: New Online Exhibit

The Seattle Municipal Archives, in celebration of Archives Month and the Archives' upcoming twenty-fifth anniversary, presents *A City at Work: Images from the Seattle Municipal Archives Photograph Collection*, an exhibit featuring over 750 City photographs taken over the past 130 years.

<http://www.seattle.gov/CityArchives/Exhibits/Photos/default.htm>



A City at Work documents the history, work, and accomplishments of Seattle city government and highlights the scope, breadth, and quality of the Seattle Municipal Archives' photographic holdings.

Surveyors at camp in Cedar River Watershed, 1910. Over a century, the City acquired ownership of the entire watershed above Masonry Dam - more than 90,000 acres.

Item 47594, Seattle Municipal Archives

A City at Work (cont.)

The exhibit begins by illustrating Seattle's growth as a city—from its geographic transformation through a series of regrades, landfills, and manmade waterways; to its structural development as the Northwest's largest city; to its attitudinal development, whether by celebrating the city's achievements or confronting its challenges—human or natural.



Ross Shire Hotel, 6th Avenue & Marion Street, 1914. One of several privately owned "pinnacles" in regraded areas where private land-owners did not arrange to have their property lowered at the same time the City paid to have the adjoining street regraded.

Item 240, Seattle Municipal Archives

The heart of *A City at Work* showcases many of the projects and services initiated or otherwise provided by Seattle city government including:

Building a network of streets, arterials and bridges, and establishing a public transit system;



Charles Street Shops and Street Department Vehicles and Personnel, 1912. Originally the Charles Street Stables, the Charles Street Shops complex south of downtown maintains the City's large fleet of vehicles.

Item 5874, Seattle Municipal Archives

2

A City at Work (cont.)

- Delivering clean mountain drinking water to Seattle residents after building a comprehensive water supply system;
- Constructing a network of sewers, drainage systems and wastewater treatment facilities;
- Building hydroelectric dams and power transmission and distribution systems to deliver low-priced energy to Seattleites;
- Establishing a system of parks, public spaces, cultural facilities, and recreational programs;
- Protecting public health and safety by establishing the police and fire departments, public hospitals and clinics, solid waste removal, and environmental protection measures;
- Planning for desired urban growth and enforcing legal business practices, building codes, and land use;
- Delivering human services and relief programs, libraries, community centers, neighborhood services, and arts programs that contribute to Seattle's social, cultural, and community well-being.

A City at Work concludes by documenting the administration of City government by elected officials and civil servants.

The exhibit's 750 images were selected from the Seattle Municipal Archives' holdings of over one million photographs and are largely representative of the Photograph Collection as a whole. The collection is the product of over 100 years of photography documenting City work or facilities taken by City employees or gathered by City agencies. More than 135,000 of these photographs may be searched and viewed on the Seattle Municipal Archives Website, and the Archives collects thousands more pictures from City departments every year.

One Hundred Years Ago: A Breathing Place

In December 1909 an initiative was filed with the City for an ordinance creating a Central Park. The petitioners signed the following statement: *Believing that there should be established in the down-town section of the city, where the population is congested and liable to increase in the future, a Central Park, to serve as a play-ground for the children, and a breathing place for the people, would respectfully petition your honorable body to acquire, by legal condemnation...the track bounded by Sixth Avenue on the west, James Street on the North, the Centre line of Eight Avenue on the east, and Alder Street on the south (exempting thereon the Court House block.).* Signatories included Charles Cowen, residents of the Alaska Building, the Colman Building, members of the Arctic Club and hundreds of others.

Office of the City Clerk Initiatives, 1802-B8, Box 1 Folder 2, Seattle Municipal Archives.

Flickr Update

The Seattle Municipal Archives now has over 1100 images on [our Flickr site](#). There are currently 24 image sets, some of which are based on object types (e.g., postcards, maps, advertisements) and some on a particular topic (transportation, Seattle at work, neighborhoods). A Pike Place Market set traces the evolution of the market from its beginnings through its rehabilitation, while the "Cabinet of Curiosities" set includes everything from wanted posters to bumper stickers to letters about Elvis.

Flickr has turned out to be a great form of outreach, garnering interest and comments from local historians, media, and citizens. Users are researching buildings and streets shown in photos, going out to take "now" versions of older images, and discussing the changing Seattle landscape. Take a look at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/seattlemunicipalarchives/>



Urban renewal planning meeting, 1962
Item 72250,
Seattle
Municipal
Archives

A user's comment on this photo reads, "That would be UW's landgrab Northlake Urban Renewal. The only question is whether it was any worse than all the parking lots around Safeco."

Arsonist's confession, 1935
Folder "Bruce Driscoll," Fire Department Central Files (Record Series 2801-03),
Seattle Municipal
Archives

FIRE PREVENTION & INSPECTION DIVISION
SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT BUSINESS ONLY

Form: _____ Page: 5 of 5

From: _____
To: _____

Statement of Robert Bruce Driscoll, taken at Fire Headquarters at 1120 Bell, May 15, 1935.

I Robert Bruce Driscoll, of my own free will and accord and without promise of any kind make the following statement:

That on the night of May 8th, I gathered papers and kindling at the rear of the church building at 723 Lake View Boulevard and placed them under the northwest corner of the building and set them on fire with the intent of the destruction of the property.

I do so because of my destitute circumstances and because I was sore at the world in general.

Signed: Robert Bruce Driscoll

Witnessed: Frank H. [unclear]
E. L. Smith
James V. Harrison
Wm. W. [unclear]

SEATTLE
13974

Flickr (cont.)

One commenter posted a link to a May 27, 1935 *Time* magazine article with more information on the arsonist Driscoll (www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,883317,00.html).

And another long time follower of the SMA account posted this:
"Great article, and great post. Love the '30s-era language 'I done this because of my destitute circumstances and because I was sore at the world in general.'"

Archives Month at SMA

October was Archives Month, and our state's theme this year was "Washington at Play." SMA held an open house on October 29, welcoming both veteran users and some who had never before been to the archives. Exhibits were on display, and archivists were available to answer questions about SMA holdings and provide research assistance. Several tours were also provided, allowing visitors a behind-the-scenes look at work areas and the storage vault, as well as a look at a few highlights from the collection.

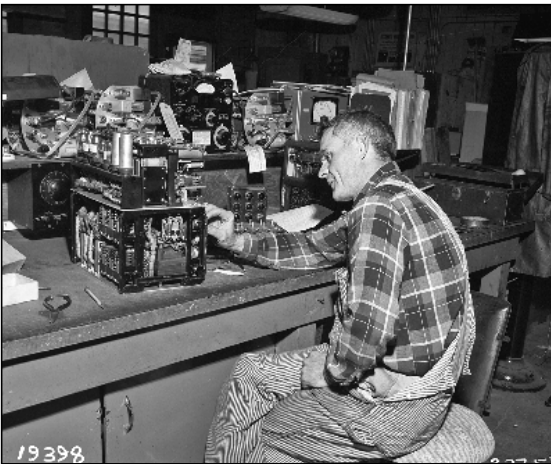


Tour of
SMA,
October
2009

SMA also participated in the Archives Fair held at the Seattle Public Library on October 30. Over a dozen area repositories had tables at the fair, and saw a steady stream of visitors seeking advice on their research and asking questions about what kinds of records were available. The event, sponsored by Seattle Area Archivists, provided a great venue for the public to learn about our local archives.

Recently Indexed Photographs

The Seattle Municipal Archives has recently finished indexing more than 1,000 photographs documenting Engineering Department activities in 1958. Along with routine departmental activities, these pictures highlight several major City initiatives from that year including construction of the Alki sewage treatment plant, the expansion of Empire Way (now Martin Luther King Jr. Way) in the Central District, and repair of the Ravenna Boulevard sewer break and cave-in. To view these images, go to the Municipal Archives Photograph Index and type the terms "1958\$" and "2613-07" into the search box.



Traffic signal repair (Fremont), March 27, 1958
Item 57190, Seattle Municipal Archives



Empire Way Paving, Dearborn Street to King Street.
June 26, 1958
Item 57895, Seattle Municipal Archives



Walk through sewer, 30th Ave. N. and E Thomas St.,
November 3, 1958
Item 59479, Seattle Municipal Archives



Interior of Alki Treatment Plant, August 11, 1958
Item 58038, Seattle Municipal Archives

Staff News

The SMA is happy to have Janet Ness on staff as part of the NHPRC processing grant. She brings a wealth of processing experience as well as a strong knowledge of Seattle.

We also welcome a new volunteer from the Czech Republic, Jitka Mlsova Chmelikova. In Seattle until June 2010 while her husband is a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Washington, Jitka will be learning how we "do" archives in the United States, or at least at the Seattle Municipal Archives. Welcome!

Seattle Municipal Archives

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