

ARCHIVES GAZETTE



City of Seattle
Seattle Municipal Archives

Number 44 Summer 2013

Office of the City Clerk
Legislative Department

Message from the City Archivist

In early June I moved my office from one room to another in City Hall. I took this as an opportunity to clean out some drawers and boxes that I had not explored in some time. Among the “treasures” was a bundle of 4x6 note cards with handwritten annotations about the Great Fire of 1889 that destroyed most of Seattle’s commercial district.

I compiled the note cards in 1989 when I produced a slide show about the fire and the City’s rebirth as a project for the dual centennials of the fire and Washington statehood.

Reading the notes reminded me how certain events in history turn on coincidence, or at least serendipity. Three examples from my research on the fire:

Prior to 1889, Gardner Kellogg was consistently elected chief of the volunteer Fire Companies by the volunteers themselves. On May 10, 1889, however, Josiah Collins defeated Kellogg, 187-73. As Collins’ luck would go, the fire occurred less than a month later and when Collins was out of town. While Collins did nothing wrong, he did bear the brunt of criticism for the volunteer companies’ inability to successfully fight the fire. When the City established a professional fire department, Collins was not considered for the position of chief; it went to Kellogg.

Volunteer Engine Company #4 had contracted to go to a fire “turniment” in Vancouver during late June or early July of 1889. In a petition to City Council, the company said it could attend only if the City allocated \$200 to defray costs. The Council refused as it had more pressing financial concerns just two-and-a-half weeks following the fire.

In November 1888, City Council passed an ordinance authorizing a special election to determine whether the City should develop a municipal water system for a cost of up to \$1 million. The City’s privately owned water systems were not adequate for a growing population. The election was called for July 8, 1889, exactly one month after the fire. The vote was 1875 in favor of developing the new system, 51 opposed. Short of a few uncontested elections of City officials, this was the most lopsided vote in Seattle’s history.

Had there been no fire, Collins might still have been defeated by Kellogg, the City might still have refused the \$200 to Engine Company #4, and voters might still have approved the waterworks. On the other hand, without the fire, all three events could have gone differently. But the fire happened and these events took place as described. “What ifs,” while fun to consider, are best relegated to historical fiction.

One of the pleasures I derive from archival work is remembering that the lives of the people and events that our records document exist within a larger context.

And those records make more sense when we are aware of the larger context and do our best to understand it.

There is, of course, a horizon of understanding. Like all horizons, it is constantly changing as we move toward it. But the nature of inquiry and scholarship compels us to continually reach toward that horizon. As archivists, we do our best to recognize and document the changing horizons of the records in our care.

--Scott Cline, City Archivist

105 Years Ago: Recommending a Seawall

On April 6, 1908, the Commissioner of Health for the City’s Sanitation Department, J E Chriton, wrote to the Mayor and City Council regarding the conditions along the waterfront. Within the district bounded by Spring and Yesler, he wrote that “...there is a vast amount of rotting timbers, planks, boxes, and all kinds of garbage....One cesspool in particular is thirty feet long, fifteen to twenty feet wide, and from eight inches to two feet deep, filled with the most horrible filth that it is possible to imagine.” It would be impossible to eradicate the Bubonic Plague, he went on to write, without “a very great and extensive line of improvement being undertaken by the executive and legislative department of this city. The most important step to be taken will be the building of a...wall along the waterfront and the filling in of all lands upon which conditions similar to those described, exist.”

Chriton’s letter followed one from the Secretary for the State Board of Health Elmer Heg, who wrote on April 3. He cited conditions between Western Avenue and the waterfront “in such a bad sanitary condition as to be dangerous, inexcusable and unjustifiable, under any considerations.” He cited conditions where “filth of all kinds has, for years, accumulated there from various sources, but mainly from the deliberate but thoughtless and careless depositing of trade waste, garbage, refuse and other filth by the occupants of the buildings in that section.”

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State of Washington
Board of Health and Bureau of Vital Statistics
Office of Secretary
Seattle, Wash.

ROSE A. BEBB, M. D., Seattle, Bacteriologist
ELTON FULMER, M. A., Pullman, Chemist
W. J. ROBERTS, A. M., Pullman, Sanitary Engineer

April 3, 1908.

Hon. Mayor and City Council,
Seattle, Wash.

Gentlemen:-

As the chief sanitary officer of the State it is my duty to call to your attention the existence of a condition very dangerous to the public health.

Comptroller File 34450 (Record Series 1802-01), Seattle Municipal Archives

(Seawall *cont.*)

To avoid fostering disease, he stated, "A city, like a human being must be clean in all parts to be and remain healthy, and negligence of hygienic law as by a city will bring its penalties to that city just as surely as such neglect does to an individual."

Although some temporary measures were put in place after 1908, the first seawall was not finished until 1936.

Recently Processed

Office of Civil Rights Human Rights Case Files come to the Archives once they are no longer of current value to the office. Records include employment and housing discrimination complaint files. The complaints are filed with the Human Rights Department, investigated, and attempts made to reach a settlement without going to court. Records include the charge or complaint, findings of fact, settlements, and case closure documents.

The SMA holds over 70 cubic feet of these records, dating from 1973 to 2001. The cases can reflect contentious periods in the city's history, where policies were in the process of changing, but change was difficult. The case of Lori Lakshas is an example. On May 20, 1976, Lakshas filed a complaint alleging sex discrimination with the Seattle Fire Department. She filed an amended complaint on March 8, 1978, alleging retaliation, harassment, and continued further loss of her rights.

Lakshas was one of six females recruited to the Seattle Fire Department in 1975; she filed a complaint after being dismissed from the recruit class in 1976. None of the other recruits who either resigned or were terminated joined her in making the charges. The investigation that ensued, however, highlighted discrimination that applied to all women applying for fire fighter jobs. Lakshas graduated with a degree in Urban Planning from the University of Washington, and swam competitively all four years she attended the school. Her case was not concluded until 1979, when investigators found that there was reasonable cause to believe several of her allegations were true and that she was discriminated against on the basis of her sex.

Background information in the file includes documentation on an injunction filed in 1976 against the Seattle Civil Service Commission by 16 men to stop the hiring of women as fire fighters for the City of Seattle in King County Superior Court. Judge Howard J. Thompson turned down the request for an injunction just hours before the recruit class was to begin.

(cont.)

(Recently processed *cont.*)

During the course of the complex investigation of Lakshas's complaint, it was found that men receiving similar injuries to hers during the evaluation process were treated differently, and that females in the recruit class were evaluated with different standards. Physical exams conducted by the Law Enforcement Officer and Fire Fighter (LEOFF) Retirement System physicians disqualified women for medical conditions later not found by their own physicians or for conditions not disqualifying for men. Disqualification was given for anemia not controlled by medication, for example, when no numerical standards were available for either blood count or hematocrit levels. Other examples included LEOFF doctors who diagnosed pregnancy and poor vision, when neither was accurate. Women were also disqualified for height when there was no minimum height requirement. Poor teeth, thyroid problems, and being overweight disqualified women but not men.

The Office of Women's Rights, which investigated the complaint (not becoming part of the Office of Civil Rights until 1980), determined on October 9, 1979, that "there is Reasonable Cause to believe that several of the Charging Party's allegations are true, that Charging Party has been discriminated against on the basis of her sex...." Of the LEOFF medical standards, the findings indicated that not only are the standards themselves discriminatory, but they were administered in a discriminatory manner.

After three more years, in May 1984, the Office of Human Rights finally settled the case, offering Lakshas \$40,000 in back pay, legal costs, and interest.

Seafair 1950's: City Light Floats



Seattle City Light Seafair Float, 1954.
Item 78634, Seattle Municipal Archives

(Seafair cont.)



Seattle City Light Seafair Float, July 1956. Item 78684, Seattle Municipal Archives



Seattle City Light Seafair Float, 1959. Item 78685, Seattle Municipal Archives

New Photographs

New images of Discovery Park continue to be added to the Photograph Index, including many of [vegetation](#). Also new are images from activities in the Legislative Department, including those of Councilmember David Della's tenure.



Councilmember Della at Domestic Violence Vigil, March 3, 2005. Item 170129, Seattle Municipal Archives

(Photographs cont.)



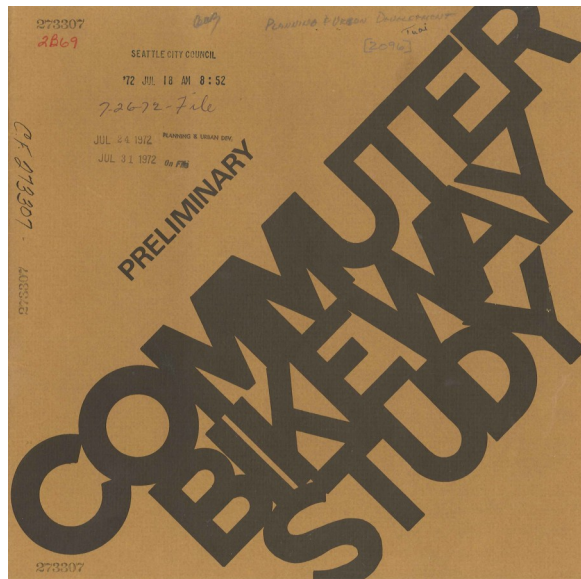
Councilmember Della attends the Filipino Chamber of Commerce of the Pacific Northwest 2005 USA-Philippines International Trade Conference. June 9, 2005. Item 170131, Seattle Municipal Archives



Councilmember Della in the Immigrant Rights Parade, May 1, 2006. Item 170078, Seattle Municipal Archives

35 Years Ago: Commuter Bikeway Study

Mayor Uhlman requested an analysis of the potential for commuter bike paths in Seattle in 1969. The Departments of Community Development, Engineering and Parks and Recreation completed the report in 1972.



Item 2096, Documents Collection. CF 273307.

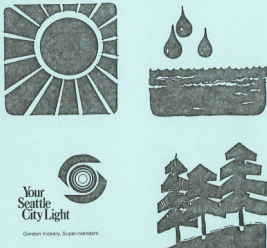
The study recommended a commitment to bicycle routes for recreation as well as transportation. A recommendation was also made for “a system of bicycle paths and lanes which will provide convenience and safety to the bicyclist while reducing conflict with the automobile and the pedestrian.”

New “Voices:” Energy Conservation

A clip from a September 1977 Utilities Committee meeting recently added to the collection of audio clips on the [Seattle Voices](#) audio exhibit space features a discussion of a federal grant about to be received from the Federal Energy Administration. Based on the “Energy 1990” study, in which the citizens and City government chose a conservation strategy over investing in the nuclear

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Grant Proposals from the City of Seattle



plants of the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS), Seattle sought assistance to test its strategies for energy conservation. The FEA awarded Seattle \$2 million over five years.

This proposal in Box 51/8 of Mayor Uhlman’s records (5287-01) describes the grant in detail.

One of the most popular Flickr images for December-March is this one of Railroad Avenue.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/seattlemunicipalarchives/8539917736/>

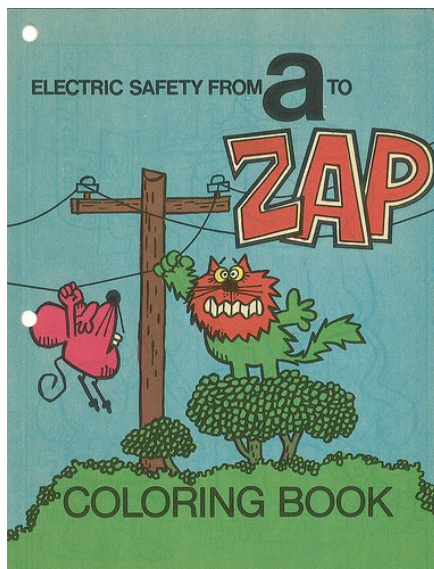


Railroad Avenue, 1939.

Item 77093, *Seattle Municipal Archives*

Flickr News

City Light has employed graphic designers and artists throughout the years to help the agency get its message out to customers. A set on Flickr entitled “[City Light Brochures and Advertising](#)” contains some examples. Brochures discuss electric rates, conservation tips, and uses for electric lighting. Billboards promote electricity use, and numerous pieces provide information about the Skagit hydropower projects. There is even a coloring book promoting electric safety to children. Many have lively, colorful graphics, and provide an interesting snapshot of one agency’s outreach efforts over several decades.



Volunteers and Interns

Irma Vela continues volunteering with us while she finishes up at the UW iSchool. Rachel Price continues processing video and film collections. Rose Oliveira continues with SMA over the summer, working on a variety of projects. Starting in June was Kevin Kopetz, who is in the history program at Seattle University. SMA is grateful for all the good work these volunteers do.

Upcoming Events

- NAGARA Annual Meeting—July 10-13 Indianapolis
- History Café—August 15, 7 PM, MOHAI
- Society of American Archivists—August 12-17 New Orleans

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