

ARCHIVES GAZETTE



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Message from the City Archivist

*From Jerusalem
April 30, 2009*

I had a political science professor in college who claimed that everything that happened during the past 25 years is political science and that everything prior is history.

A few days ago I was exposed to another view of history while on a walking tour down Mount Scopus to the foot of the Mount of Olives outside the southern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. Our guide (Israel's licensed guides complete a rigorous two-year course in the history and archaeology of the region) was speaking about a 19th century church and commented, "We cannot really talk about this as history; for us history is one or two thousand years or more."

History in Israel is complex. Every inch of the country either exhibits or has hidden deep history.

Early in our stay we visited Tel Dan, a national park near the Lebanese border and at the base of the Golan Heights. The park trails can be walked in an hour if you don't stop to admire the beauty or the antiquities. Soon after entering the park, you find an arched Canaanite gate from the 18th century BCE, thought to be the oldest complete arch in the world. Just a few hundred steps to the north is a corrugated metal bunker from 1967 that sits just above a former Syrian military patrol road.

Layer upon layer of the land exhibits the remains of the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages; Canaanite, Israelite, and Assyrian rule; the Greeks, Romans, Nabateans, and Byzantines; the early Islamic domination; the wars of the Crusades; the Mongols, Seljuks, Mamaluks, and Ottomans; the British Mandate; and the current State of Israel.

It is impossible to walk down a street, turn a corner, take a country stroll without speculating about what (or who) might have gone before—and what might go forward into the future. I also find myself reflecting on what impact my presence might have on this historical stage.

This musing leads me to consider a third approach to the nature of history that opened this message. As archivists in what some have called a post-modern era, we must consider the argument by South African Verne Harris that every action we employ in managing archives becomes part of the context of those archives, that every action changes them. He suggests we are recordmakers, not record-keepers.

As mediators of the record (and, perhaps, arbiters), we have a profound influence on how archives are viewed and used. This is no small responsibility and one that can be accomplished only by fully engaging with the deep history of our own places.

— Scott Cline, City Archivist

New Exhibit "Strength and Stamina: Women in the Seattle Fire Department"

A new exhibit on the history of women in the Seattle Fire Department was created with support from the Women's History Consortium, part of the Washington State Historical Society. The exhibit tells the story of the women who entered a department with a strong male culture and changed the image of female firefighters from the unusual to the usual. Their story is one of courage, hard work, and perseverance.



Recruiting billboard in downtown Seattle, 1966
Item 73079, Seattle Fire Department Slides (2801-09), Seattle Municipal Archives

Barbara (Bonnie) Beers was the first woman to successfully complete recruit training, joining the department in 1977. She cited the physical rigor, as well as the monetary benefits and sense of personal accomplishment, as her challenges and rewards. The psychological burden of being the first woman in the department was heavy, with many of her male coworkers (and members of the public) making it clear they did not believe she belonged there.

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Other women followed Beers into fire fighting careers. By the late 1980s the Seattle Fire Department was considered a national model for the recruitment, hiring and retention of women as firefighters, providing assistance to other fire service organizations across the nation. Ten years after the first woman firefighter was hired, the Department had 54 women firefighters. Discriminatory practices did not disappear, however. In 1987, two firefighters filed a lawsuit to force the relief association to provide disability benefits to pregnant firefighters as they did to other firefighters with temporary disabilities. As a result of the suit, the Department began offering light duty work to all firefighters who were temporarily disabled, improving working conditions for everyone.



Barbara (Bonnie) Beers
Photograph by Jim Loso. Courtesy of Bonnie Beers

The high numbers of women entering the Department in the 1970s and 1980s were thinning out by the 1990s, however, and numbers of women entering were not as great. In 1998, Initiative 200 was passed in the state of Washington, banning ethnic and gender preferences in hiring; the percentage of women recruits declined further. Discrimination charges had not run their course, either. In 1993, the City settled a sexual harassment suit with a female firefighter who had been on the force since 1983.

Women had shown from 1975 through 2008 that one factor remained equal between the sexes, and that was motivation. It was no longer a question of whether or not women could do the job. As of 2008, 93 of the 1,038 firefighters in Seattle were women, close to 9% and much higher than the national average. Women were working in all areas of the Fire Department, as paramedics, dispatchers, and fire marshal inspectors, as well as firefighters.

The exhibit is currently on display at History House in Fremont, and a second copy has travelled to the Museum of History & Industry, the Women in the Trades Fair at the Seattle Center, and the City of Seattle Emergency Operations Center. Additionally, Beers spoke at City Hall during Women's History Month about her career, an event also supported by the Women's History Consortium grant.

Historical Look at Institutional Race and Social Justice

The Archives called upon some of its researchers to lead discussions within the Department of how discriminatory policy decisions have affected Seattle throughout its history. Historians James Gregory, Coll Thrush, and Matt Klinge provided insight for the Legislative Department on policies resulting in exclusion of various groups of people relating to housing, employment, and environmental issues. Historical discussions provided a glimpse of the variety of lenses used to see our world and justify policy decisions by those in power. The discussions provided a thoughtful backdrop for a department-wide discussion of race and the viewing of "Race the Power of an Illusion."

One Hundred Years Ago : "In Gala Attire"

On May 29th, 1909, the Victoria Realty Co. wrote to City Council requesting they consider decorating the city with flags, which for the period of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition "would figure out approximately 4½¢ per day for each individual decoration." They proposed putting the flags on First, Second and Third Avenues, including side streets, with eight poles to the block, or about 300 flags. "The said decorations will be uniform in all respects...and the effect on the different avenues during the day and more especially at night, with the reflection of the cluster lights could hardly be improved upon, if you wish the City to appear in gala attire." The Finance and Buildings and Grounds Committee rejected the request, instead funding a Welcome Arch, located at Second and Marion.

Events 2009

- May 26: AKCHO Monthly Meeting
Kenmore Community Club
- June 12-13: Pacific Northwest Labor History
Association Conference, Seattle
- July 15-18: NAGARA Annual Meeting,
Seattle

Newly Processed: Newsletters and Brochures

We have recently processed a large set of newsletters, brochures, and other publications produced by city agencies. Employee newsletters were published both by the city as a whole and by some city departments to share news of personnel moves, social events, policy changes, and project updates. These can be an excellent resource for research about employee culture and departmental changes.

Other newsletters were created for customers and citizens to notify them of city services, upcoming projects, and special events. Various brochures, flyers, and information packets also served these purposes. These publications are useful for seeing which projects and issues have been noteworthy over time and for looking at how the city disseminated information about its priorities and programs.

The publications are arranged by the creating department and have been entered into our database systems.



Seattle City Light News, January 1955, Record Series 1201-09.

New titles in the database include: *Civil Defense Information Bulletin*, *City Light's Network*, and the Department of Human Services *Connections* newsletter.

Photo Feature: Vehicles and Equipment Photograph Albums

In order to perform their varied duties, the Engineering Department relied on a fleet of vehicles and equipment. The Archives cataloged the contents of three photo albums containing an inventory dating from 1920 to 1952.



Vehicle in front of Engineering Department offices, November 10, 1951.
Item 59322, Seattle Municipal Archives

City employees could visit their clients in style, driving a 1951 Ford V-8 Business Coupe – the album shows twenty of them in the fleet, designated by serial number, all purchased from Wm. O. McKay Co. in 1951.

When they needed a little more trunk space they pulled out the 1940 GMC 2 Ton Dump Truck. It had a 6-cylinder motor and



23rd Avenue South (paving) center strips of black top operations, September 16, 1941.

Item 39953, Seattle Municipal Archives

825x20 tires. These workers were using it while paving 23rd Avenue South.

Sometimes only a specialized vehicle will do. To repair street lights without a ladder, the workers could use a 1948 4 Ton White Signal Tower Truck. This one is equipped with American Hydraulic Tower Lift, Model 7A-91, Body Type 5861. Its value when the album was made is listed at \$12,600.18.

Vehicle Albums, cont.



Signal Tower Truck, October 8, 1948
Item 47480, Seattle Municipal Archives

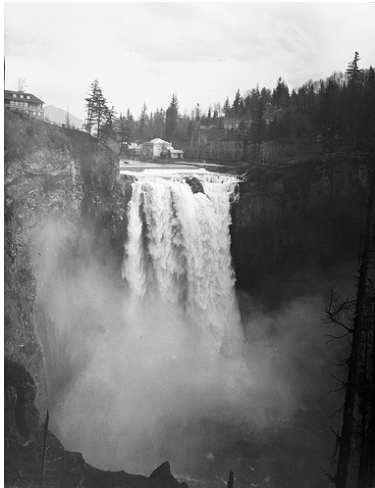


Tower truck in operation, August 10, 1949.
Item No. 41894, Seattle Municipal Archives

The images are all accessible from the Archives homepage by searching the Series ID "2613-20" in the "Search Photos" box. The photo album pages with identifying information can be viewed by visiting the Archives reference room.

Sightings of the Archives

Our latest photo set on Flickr has a "Great Outdoors" theme, featuring images of landscapes, wildlife, flowers, and



Item 1829, Engineering Department Photographic Negatives (2613-07), Seattle Municipal Archives

people enjoying outdoor adventures. A 1921 photo of Snoqualmie Falls is a nice example.

Flickr users have been doing some interesting things with images that we

have posted. One blended a 1959 photo of 45th Street and University Way with a current photo of the same intersection, creating a past and present view in one very neat image.



79-175 East End of Hot House of E. D. Fore, 1817-21st Ave., showing Water Mark - Flocced 5/7/1923
Picture by Chester 5/1923, Seattle Municipal Archives

Located at 1817 21st Ave. S. Item 49444, Water Department Photographic Negatives (8200-13), Seattle Municipal Archives

Another user was intrigued by a 1923 photo of a farm on Beacon Hill; she wrote a blog post looking at the history of the site with now and then photos and found that one of the buildings seen in the background is still in existence. And another commented on a 1936 photo of the Chief Seattle statue in Belltown, adding a photo of his own family in front of the statue in the late 1970s not long after they had immigrated from Vietnam.

We continue to receive good feedback about the site as a whole, and many of our images have been featured on local blogs and other websites.

Staff News

City Archivist Scott Cline is on sabbatical in Israel through June. In the recent Society of American Archivists election, he was elected to serve a three-year term on Council.

The Archives is thrilled to have Western Washington University intern Andrea McConchie through the summer. She comes with experience as a paralegal and a certificate of Museum Studies. Her expected completion date from Western is 2010. She is gaining experience in processing a variety of collections.

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