



ARCHIVES GAZETTE

Seattle Municipal Archives

Number 2 Winter 1999

Office of the City Clerk
Legislative Department

Visiting Archivists from China

In November 1999, a delegation of 12 archivists from China visited the Municipal Archives. Included were archivists from the National Archives and provincial and local archives. They came from various regions of China, including Beijing and Shanghai. Seattle was the last leg of their ten-day tour of archives in the United States. They chose the Seattle Municipal Archives as one of their sites because of the on-line access to indexes, images, and legislation available to users.

Scott Cline gave an overview of the Seattle Municipal Archives, including a discussion of the indexes available on-line and the photographic database. Presenting the resources of the City Clerk's office, Ernie Dornfeld provided a sketch of the legislative databases and other resources offered to users of the Clerk's records. Scott then gave the archivists a tour of the Archives. The group was particularly interested in electronic access and preservation.

City Archivist Scott Cline in China

In September 1999, Scott Cline was invited to participate in an international seminar in Shanghai, China on "Local Archives in the 21st Century: Challenges and Strategies." He was one of two American archivists attending and gave the first paper of the conference. His remarks included a history of local government archives, problems facing local jurisdictions, and prospects for improving the conditions of local records in the 21st century. Cline also chaired the concluding session dealing with access to archival records.

The seminar included 20 archivists from China and 17 from around the world. As part of the seminar, participants visited several Chinese archives and cultural institutions.

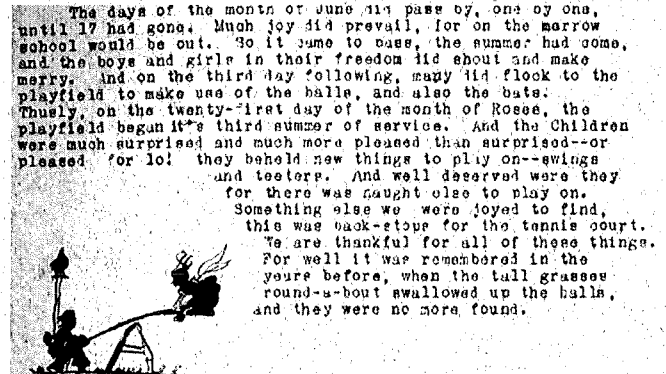
Seattle Parks Department Records Project

The Archives has completed a King County Landmarks and Heritage Commission grant focusing on Parks Department Records.

The history of Seattle parks is richly documented in the Archives, and the Heritage Commission grant focused on two collections that illuminate the history of the Parks Department and its facilities especially well. These two collections are the Don Sherwood Parks History Collection and the Ben Evans Recreation Program History Collection.

The grant project focused on digitizing, cataloging, and preserving the photographic images in both collections. The 2500 photographs contain historically significant images of Seattle landscapes and social history. In addition, finding aids were created for both the Ben Evans and Sherwood Collections, describing records in each collection. The Evans Collection documents the history of the recreation program in Seattle and reflects the history of recreation nationally. It contains information on parks facilities and various recreation programs throughout the City. Included in the collection are

playground reports from 1925 to 1931 describing and evaluating the summer programs for children at each playground.



Playground Report, Youngstown Playfield, 1927
Box 41/17

Ben Evans Recreation Program History Collection

The Sherwood Collection documents the history of the Parks Department and the development of individual parks. Public access to finding aids and digital copies of photographs for both collections are available through the Archives' website:

<http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/leg/clerk/archhome.htm>

Hard copies of the finding aids were distributed to branches of the Seattle Public Library, the Museum of History and Industry, State Archives Puget Sound Region, and the King County Library.

New Accessions

Three Council members left office at the end of 1999, resulting in large accessions of Council papers. Over 50 cubic feet of records were transferred by Council President Sue Donaldson, relating to many issues including Sand Point, low income housing, parks, construction of a new library, and neighborhood plans. Tina Podlodowski transferred over 25 feet of records, many relating to neighborhood, health and technology issues. Twenty feet of records from Martha Choe document transportation, capital projects, and other budget and finance issues.

Recently Processed: Mayor's Messages

The Mayor's Messages are a subset of the Comptroller Files or Clerk Files, known as CFs. The CFs are a wide variety of documents filed with the City Clerk's Office, including petitions, reports, and speeches. This collection includes reports, speeches, and other messages from Seattle mayors. In 13 boxes, measuring 5.2 cubic feet, the Mayor's Messages date from 1896 to 1985. The Messages are grouped by Mayor and arranged chronologically. Although a large

percentage of Mayor's Messages are represented in this collection, the collection is not a complete set of the Mayor's Messages for these years. Additional Mayor's Messages are added to the record series on an ongoing basis.

Consisting primarily of vetoes of Council Bills, the Mayor's Messages also include annual messages to City Council, budget messages, executive orders, proclamations and various other communications. The Annual Messages are useful summaries of accomplishments for a specific year and also identify key issues for the following year from the Mayor's perspective. The vetoes are useful for identifying significant issues through the years. For example, liquor licenses are a frequent subject of vetoes through 1913 and street railway franchises and related issues can be traced using vetoes through the 1920s. Garbage collection is another issue that arises several times between 1903 and 1913. Of note is the quantity of vetoes submitted by Mayor Gill for the years 1910-1917. While the Mayor's Messages, in many cases, reflect the tone of the relationship the mayor had with Council, it should be noted that not all Council Bills were vetoed because of disagreement with the Council. Some Council Bills were vetoed for purely technical reasons.

The collection is described at an item level. The description, accessible in the subject database, includes: title of the veto, Council Bill number, the mayor's name, the CF number, box and folder numbers, and date. To retrieve the item level description, use the record identification number "1802-C2" as the search term in the Archives subject index.

One Hundred Years Ago in Seattle

From documents in the Seattle Municipal Archives, one can get a sense of many aspects of life in the City as the century turned from 1899 to 1900.

In December 1899 a petition by Mrs. M.A. Gardner was placed on file with the City. The document states that the "petitioner is and for some years has been a widow, having five children, the eldest being fifteen years of age, and which petitioner is endeavoring to educate and care for by her own exertions, having no other means of resources. That petitioner is now delinquent and indebted to the city for water rent since the month of March 1899...the whole amount of her indebtedness...being to date \$10.... That she has no means wherewith to pay the same, and absolutely all of her earnings are required to clothe and properly care for herself and said children" Mrs. Gardner petitioned for free water "until such time as the city shall again require payment therefor" and cancellation of her debt. The Superintendent of Lighting and Water Works, L.B. Youngs, recommended "the prayer of the petition be granted" and the Claims Committee in the Legislative Department agreed. (CF 6743)

The Annual Report of the Superintendent of Streets, Sewers and Parks for 1899 states "That the planked streets of the city are in a deplorable condition, is evidenced in nearly every portion of the city, and many of the planked streets of the business portion are in such a state of decay and so utterly worn out, as to make them absolutely unsafe, and in many places dangerous, and a menace to public safety.[sic]"

In his 1899 Annual Report, the Labor Commissioner writes "Of the 16,073 men who received employment through this office, among whom we do not include hop pickers, there are represented almost every conceivable vocation and trade from nurse to blacksmith, and from railroad laborers to gospel singers."

Of "female help" the Commissioner stated that "the demand and supply have been about in the same relative proportion as in previous years, which means a continual shortage of domestic help, while the supply of applicants for the lighter and more desirable positions such as chamber work and clerking has been abundant. Quite a number of girls have come from the east during the year and taken positions of house work but this increase has been far to [sic] small to supply the increased demand...." In December 1899 the highest number of orders for women employees were for "general housework" (100) and the lowest for "companion" (1).

An Excerpt from the Archives

"We have now in service 42 horses. During the year two have died, four sold or turned over to the street department. Horses [are] like men, some are good, others indifferent, and some worthless."

Page 6, Tenth Annual Report of the Chief of the Fire Department to the Mayor and City Council of the City of Seattle for the year ending December 31, 1900.

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