



# ARCHIVES GAZETTE

Seattle Municipal Archives

Number 3 Spring 2000

Office of the City Clerk  
Legislative Department

## Chinese Business Archivists Visit

The Seattle Municipal Archives hosted 14 business archivists from China on the afternoon of May 10. The delegation was on an educational tour of the United States which included stops at the Bank of Hawaii, Microsoft, Boeing, the National Archives, New York State Archives, American Insurance Group, and Chase Manhattan Archives.

They were particularly interested in the Archives and City Clerk's Office indexing and access system to legislative records, archives, and photographs. It was the second Chinese delegation to visit in the past six months.

## History Day

Two middle school students, Nick Garaas and Sara Hawley, who used the resources of the Seattle Municipal Archives, were regional winners in the National History Day competition for an exhibit they created on the Great Seattle Fire of 1889.

Their three-panel exhibit used photographs, documents, and other graphics to detail the fire itself and the City's response in its aftermath. They explored the development of Seattle's municipal water system, the creation of a new building code, and the rebuilding of the 118-acre burn area.

Nick and Sara are students at Terrace Park School in Mountlake Terrace. Although their exhibit did not win at the next level--the State-wide competition--they are to be commended for their excellent work.

## Researching the Great Fire

There are several sources for researching one of the most dramatic events in Seattle's history, the Great Fire of June 6, 1889. Available documentation provides a glimpse of how everyday life continued, despite the destruction wrought by the fire, as well as how the City rebuilt its infrastructure and changed its legislation as a result of the fire.

The *General Files* is a collection of petitions, reports, claims, and other documents filed with the City Clerk between 1875 and 1903. A list of fire-related documents in the *General Files* is available. Included are pre-fire requests for fire protection equipment and services, post-fire petitions regarding tents erected as temporary structures, proposals for new fire fighting equipment, and records related to street repair, building construction, and water and sewer issues.

The *City Charters* (1869, 1890, 1896) are also available for researchers and can be used to study changes in powers of the City Council and the Mayor and increased governmental regulatory powers related especially to public safety and public works.

*City Council Meeting Minutes* document discussions of the City's proposed and actual responses to the Fire. Issues include replatting, building codes and inspections, and condemnations for street purposes. Full text of Resolutions and Ordinances is available through the Office of the City Clerk.

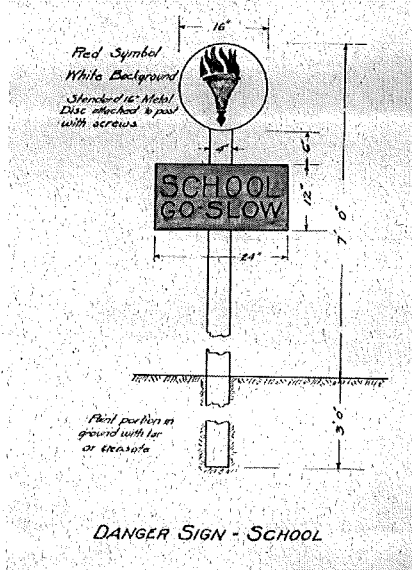
*Mayor's Messages* and *Departmental Annual Reports* enable researchers to track issues, such as building inspections and fire department equipment and funding. The bulk of these records date from 1894, however.

Primary sources at other locations include the scrapbook of the Seattle General Relief Committee at the University of Washington Manuscripts and Special Collections (1889-1914) and photographs at the Museum of History and Industry and University of Washington.

## What's New in the Archives

*Annual Reports* that have been filed with the City Clerk are being reprocessed in order to make them accessible by department or agency. Most agencies began filing annual reports in 1894. The reports are a good source for chronology of public works, agency histories, and changing perspectives on key City issues. The next few issues of the Gazette will highlight the Annual Reports of specific departments.

The *Department of Streets and Sewers Annual Reports* (1802-17) date from 1895 to 1931.



"The rapid increase in motor driven vehicles and the greater speed with which they travel necessitates precautions not heretofore contemplated.... The new danger signs which the department is installing throughout the city have met with universal approval."

*Department of Streets and Sewers Annual Report, 1921.*  
Record ID 1802-17

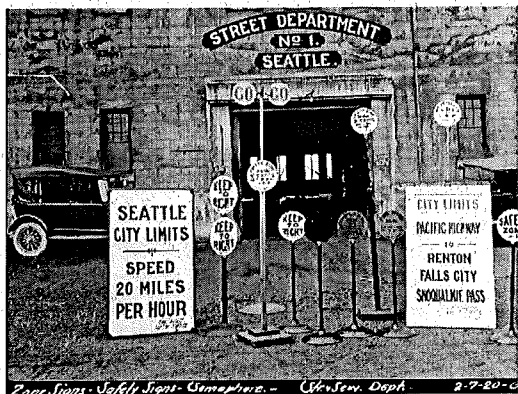
The Department of Streets and Sewers was responsible for the planning, construction, repair and cleaning of the City's streets, sidewalks and sewers. City Council appointed the first Street Commissioner in 1875. The position came under the jurisdiction of the Board of Public Works in 1890. The position of Superintendent of Streets, Sewers and Parks was established in 1896, although authority over Parks

was removed in 1904. The department was abolished in 1936 and became the Maintenance Division of the Engineering Department.

The Streets and Sewers Annual Reports date from 1895 to 1931, although there is not a report for every year in this series. Other copies of Streets and Sewers Annual Reports are located in the Engineering Department Unrecorded Subject Files on microfiche at the Seattle Municipal Archives and in hard copy at the Puget Sound Regional Branch of the State Archives. Additional copies can be found at the Seattle Public Library.

The earliest report, for 1895, is an itemized list of new construction for the year. The 1904 reports includes both narrative and statistics, reports of the street inspector, sidewalk inspector, sewer inspector, and a report on work of the chain gang. The 1905, 1908 and 1909 reports are primarily statistical; the 1908 report includes suggested amendments to ordinances relating to streets and sewers. Discussion of the benefits of paving streets and the problems of planked roads run through these reports. Reports in the 1910s have more narrative than earlier reports and discuss the huge increase in motor driven vehicles and the implications for the department as well as the effect of war activities on the Department of Streets and Sewers.

Reports in the 1920s continue to have narrative and many statistical reports. Root bound sewers, snow storms, and maintenance and repair costs are constant themes throughout the reports. The last report in this series is 1931.



Item No. 12768, February 7, 1920. Department of Streets and Sewers Photographs.

To date, 1,562 images taken by the Department of Streets and Sewers photographers between 1916 and 1934 are available on-line via the Municipal Archives Photograph Database.

### City Council Records

The Archives recently completed the processing of the subject files of former City Councilmember *Tina Podlodowski*. The entire record series now totals over 19 cubic feet, and bulk dates are from 1996 to 1999. The Podlodowski papers include information relating to technology and telecommunications, City government technology issues, background materials on the Added Entertainment Ordinance, public safety issues, neighborhoods and neighborhood planning, labor and labor relations, public health, and housing. The file listing for the

collection has been added to the Archives Subject File index.

Podlodowski's committee files will be processed during the summer.

### An Excerpt from the Archives

"The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition will be held in this city during the coming year, and as a result numbers of the best pickpockets, confidence men and criminals will flock to this city. The exposition grounds will be amply protected both by uniform men and detectives from the east who are familiar with eastern crooks and criminals; but no provision has been made to protect the city."

*Seattle Police Department Annual Report, 1908, p. 2.*  
Record ID 1802-H8

### Recent Accessions

Since publication of the previous Gazette, the Archives has received large collections of records from Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), Seattle City Light (SCL), and the defunct Department of Community Development (DCD).

The SPU records include files of the City Engineer, records of the Court Engineer, flood studies, Cedar River Watershed Right of Way materials, monthly weather records, and records related to Court Cases tracked by the Engineering Department. These records date from 1900 to the early 1990s.

Among the SCL records are Superintendent's files from the 1950s, a large collections of published studies and reports.

The DCD collection includes records of the Director, Urban Renewal materials, Community Development Block Grant Files, and Design Commission project files.

### Footnotes and Credits

In the most recent *Journal of American History* (Volume 86 No. 4 March 2000), UW Professor Linda Nash's article "The Changing Experience of Nature: Historical Encounters with a Northwest River" used images from the Archives photograph collection and the Archives collection of Seattle City Light Annual Reports.

Also recently published is *With Dignity: The Birth and Spirit of Odessa Brown Children's Clinic* by Louis Appel. Appel made extensive use of the Seattle Model City Program records in the Municipal Archives.

### Contact the Archives:

Seattle Municipal Archives  
600 Fourth Avenue, Room 104  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Fax: (206) 386-9025  
<http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/leg/clerk/archhome.htm>

Scott Cline, City Archivist (206) 684-8353  
[scott.cline@ci.seattle.wa.us](mailto:scott.cline@ci.seattle.wa.us)

Anne Frantilla, Assistant City Archivist (206) 233-7807  
[anne.frantilla@ci.seattle.wa.us](mailto:anne.frantilla@ci.seattle.wa.us)