

# ARCHIVES GAZETTE

City of Seattle  
Seattle Municipal Archives

Number 6 Winter 2001



Office of the City Clerk  
Legislative Department

## New Space for the Archives

In January of this year, the Archives moved into new temporary space in the Municipal Building. The Archives is still on the first floor of the Municipal Building, but now on the west side of the building. The move went very smoothly and the staff is pleased with the new space. The research area is larger (and quieter) and offices have windows. Telephone numbers and address have not changed. An open House is planned for early May.

The Archives will occupy this space during the construction of the new City Hall. Ground-breaking is expected this month, with completion of the new building slated for 2003.

For information on the new Civic Center, which includes the new City Hall, the Justice Center, and open spaces, visit the City's website: <http://www.cityofseattle.net/civiccenter/>.

## Earthquake Rattles Archives

Although the Municipal Building shook and rattled during the earthquake on February 28, no damage was sustained to the building, the staff, or the materials in the archives. The building was closed for most of the afternoon for a structural inspection but was open again the next day.

## Exhibit

The Archives staff is constructing an exhibit on civic space City government has occupied since its incorporation in 1869. The exhibit will coincide with ground-breaking for the new City Hall. A brief synopsis of the exhibit is included here. Please come see the exhibit in the Municipal Building lobby from the end of April through May.

### Seattle's City Halls

From 1869, when the City of Seattle was founded, to 1882, the City's business took place in different locations throughout the city, in rented space. It was said that meetings were sometimes held in the old Frye Opera House at Front and Marion streets.

The first City Hall was a brick and wood two-story building, 40 x 60 feet. It was built on what is now Second Avenue South, between

Yesler Way and Washington Street. Second Avenue South was South Third Street prior to 1895.

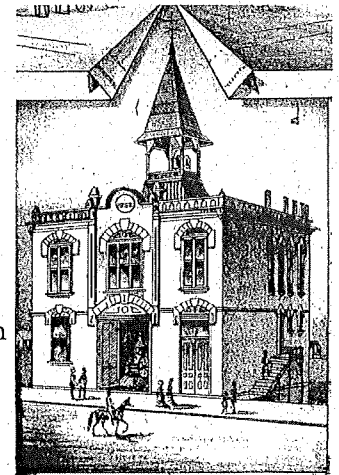
Despite being housed above the Fire Engine Co. No. 1, the disastrous Great Fire of June 6, 1889 destroyed the first City Hall, along with all tax information for 1885, 1886, and 1887. City offices were moved temporarily to a converted house between Fourth and Fifth Avenues and Yesler Way and Terrace.

The 1890 charter introduced a bicameral legislature, significantly enlarging the size of the Council. Rooms were rented on the fifth floor of the Butler Block on Second and James and the larger Council was moved there.

This temporary space was inadequate, however, and in his March 1891 address, Mayor Harry White recommended purchase of the old County Court House, about to be vacated as King County moved up the hill. The "Castle," as it was called, was an unsafe building with many rooms and levels patch-worked on at different times.

In 1909 the city moved into the Yesler Building, then known as the Public Safety Building. Not intended to house City Hall, the Yesler Building quickly became too small.

After the public defeated the well-thought-out civic plan by Virgil Bogue in 1911, the City arranged to share space with the County in the new County-City Building.



Etching of first City Hall  
The West Shore, Sept. 1882



County-City Building October 26, 1917 Item 38044  
Don Sherwood Parks History Collection,  
Seattle Municipal Archives

The building was dedicated on May 4, 1916. Five additional floors were added to the original building in 1930.



Municipal Building, April 16, 1970  
Neg. 25532 Engineering Dept. Negatives.  
Seattle Municipal Archives

By 1959, the City had to look for space because the County needed its entire building. They decided to build their own building. The contract was let in 1960 and the building finished in 1962. For the first time in its history, the city of Seattle had a municipal building devoted exclusively to city use.

The Municipal Building was completed for a sum of \$7 million which was paid in cash.

The City began to explore options for additional space in the 1970s, and various possibilities were considered through the years. The new City Hall, designed by architect Peter Bohlin, was approved by City Council on January 22, 2001 with plans to have construction completed by January 2003.

## General Files Project

With a grant from the King County Landmarks and Heritage Commission, The Seattle Municipal Archives has begun processing one of its earliest collections. Dating from 1880 to 1902, the General Files predate the Comptroller or Clerk Files. The General Files include committee reports, petitions, and communications from a variety of City agencies. Eric Ervin was hired with grant funds catalog documents at the item level. Catalog information includes subject, date, form of document, and names. The project, including an online guide, is expected to be completed by the end of 2001.

The records contain voices of Seattle residents and City officials as they struggled with social, cultural, and political issues facing a growing City, such as the need for more street lights, better roads, and sewer and water systems. The documents also record how the City met one of its biggest disasters, the Great Fire of 1889. This selection is excerpted from a response of the Committee on Fire and Water to a petitioner. The transcription of a portion of the document is as follows:

"Your Committee on Fire and Water to whom was referred a Petition of Edgar Bryan and R. J. Graham asking for permission to enclose their tent with glass and iron, beg to report that in our opinion a general permission ought to be given to the 'sojourners in tents' to put a roof of corrugated iron on their tents for protection during the approaching winter, but we do not deem it prudent to extend this privilege to the walls."

Your Committee on Fire and Water to whom was referred a Petition of Edgar Bryan and R. J. Graham asking for permission to enclose their tent with glass and iron, beg to report that in our opinion a general permission ought to be given to the 'sojourners in tents' to put ~~on~~ a roof of corrugated iron on their tents for protection during the approaching winter, but we do not deem it prudent to extend this privilege to the walls.

Document 990201 General Files

In addition to the areas mentioned above, the General Files will be a resource for many other areas of research. A debate between citizens and City Council over license fees for women's employment agencies exemplifies documents that could be used to research women and work in early Seattle. Petitions came from several sources regarding an ordinance requiring \$100 for an employment office (intelligence office) license and security bonds of \$2,000.

Mrs. Hubbard wrote on May 15, 1890:

"Will you allow me to call your attention to the fact that there are offices in the city that only find employment for women and do not do one half the business that those offices do that find employment for men, .... I wonder that such a very small business should have to pay a license and if so, such a very high one."

Another petition, signed by ten individuals, dated May 19, 1890, stated:

"It is a well known fact that employers and employees among the ladies do not equal one tenth of those among men. To place the license fees at the same figures for both classes of agencies is practically to drive the ladies from the business, and place it entirely in the hand of men against whom only have complaints of unfair dealing been made..."

The General Files will be open to research when the project is completed, in January 2002.

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