

ARCHIVES GAZETTE

City of Seattle
Seattle Municipal Archives

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Legislative Department

Message from the City Archivist

I've been back to work for about five weeks following my two-and-a-half month sojourn in Israel, and I'm still processing much of the experience. Part of this exercise transports my thoughts back 30 years to my first trip to the Middle East and a particular incident—one of little drama, but lasting impact; and one indelibly etched in my memory.

In 1979, during a four month trip to Israel, we visited the kibbutz where my wife had volunteered in 1974. At Friday night dinner in the communal dining hall, a kindly-looking, grey-haired man pushed a cart of chicken by our table and served us. I learned from my wife that this was Abba Kovner, a renowned Israeli poet and the leader of Vilna's Jewish partisans who mounted a resistance movement in the Vilna ghetto and later fled to the Lithuanian forests to fight the Nazis during World War II. In 1979, he looked like someone's benevolent grandfather—and, no doubt, he was.

In late May of this year, I was viewing the exhibits at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, and came upon a video that mesmerized me. It was a sound recording of a 43-year old Abba Kovner reading the 1942 manifesto he wrote to persuade Vilna Jews to join the resistance; he was reading it at the 1961 trial of Adolph Eichmann. I watched the video six times, captivated by the power and intensity, especially in the eyes, of the soft-spoken poet/warrior.

Today, among the many things that strike me about this is the juxtaposition of life and times with a sequence of events. Kovner formed the United Partisan Organization in 1942 (and later was an officer in the 1948 Israel War of Independence), I got a piece of chicken from him in 1979, in 1961 he testified at the Eichmann trial, testimony which I saw on video in 2009. This experience with Kovner (like reading archivists Hugh Taylor or Verne Harris) has led me to consider professional questions in ways I could not fathom earlier in my career.

History happens sequentially; it has to. There is no other option. However, our experience of history is non-linear. While we might look back on events and try to construct a sequential accounting, our understanding of myriad historical movements and meanings drawn from those events is less tidy. And when we superimpose memory on "fact" to create myth and narrative, the whole business becomes quite messy.

Historian Richard White once mused that history is the enemy of memory. He was writing about how research in documentary sources often contradicts personal memory, and even national memory. Yet, if current research in the nature of information tells us anything, it is that there are no neutral documents. Records are created out of human experience, by human hands. Decisions about retention are human decisions, as are decisions about archival description. And certainly how archives are interpreted by researchers is open to their own human subjectivity.

This notion puts greater pressure on archivists to be cognizant of our own biases, assumptions, and, even politics; and to take great care in our "powerful" functions of appraisal, description, and reference. My knowledge of and experience with Abba Kovner is measured by memory, history, romance, myth, and joy. All of these affect my ability to represent that experience. Recognizing and managing those forces, and others that come into play day in and day out, hopefully informs our work.

— Scott Cline, City Archivist

NHPRC Grant

The Seattle Municipal Archives received a \$106,480 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for a two-year basic processing project. The overall goal of the project is to process 1,858 linear feet of records, representing the Archives entire current backlog.

The Archives will hire a project archivist for the grant period and commit .75 FTE regular staff to the project. The start date is October 1, 2009.

Employing a form of the processing methodology commonly known as More Product, Less Process (MPLP) and regularizing an internal system for processing accessions at the point they enter the

repository, the Archives will not only eradicate its backlog, but will ensure that new acquisitions don't



A portion of the backlog at SMA,
August 2009

enter the backlog.

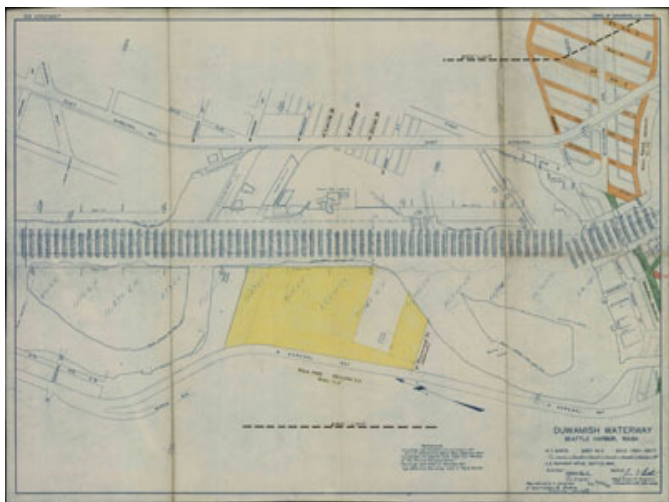
The principle performance measures of the grant include the creation of MARC catalog records that will be submitted to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections international database, and the construction of Encoded Archival Description finding aids to be added to the Northwest Digital Archives.

To our knowledge, this is the first—or at least the most ambitious—MPLP project of its type undertaken in a government archives setting.

The archives in question are public records and therefore must be available for public use. This project will help reference staff know in greater detail the content of these particular records, and make it much easier to provide access to the Archives' research community.

Washington State Maps Grant Completed

Through a grant from the Washington State Archives supporting preservation of local records, the Seattle Municipal Archives digitized 150 maps and sent out over 60 maps for conservation work. The project was designed to improve public access to SMA's maps through conservation to stabilize and repair maps in poor



Item 1043. Duwamish Waterway / Seattle Harbor, Wash. Seattle Engineering Department; Scale 1:2400, 1927.

condition, the creation of digital images of maps for integration into an existing online map index, and enhanced cataloging of objects. Prior to the project, a large percentage of maps were unusable due to their poor condition and lack of cataloging and indexing access points.

Maps (cont.)

This 1927 map of the Duwamish Waterway shows building outlines, depth soundings and fill area. The location of Stetson Post Lumber Co. and its saw mill is one of the identifiable structures on the map.

Conservators Julia Thompson and Carolina Veenstra treated a total of 75 maps. Their work included cleaning, mending, humidification, reinforcement, tape removal, and lining. Maps treated by the conservators are much more stable and therefore more accessible to researchers. The work performed was beyond the scope of what SMA staff is trained for or has time to do and was of immense value to the Archives. Maps treated document various aspects of the Cedar River watershed, transportation planning in Seattle, topography, parks and waterways. Special attention was given to a 1895 waterworks map illustrating the entire watershed. Stained and backed with degraded linen, it could not be used without tearing. Washing and rebacking restored the watercolor and strengthened the paper so it is not only useable but exemplary of the engineering work of that period.

One Hundred Years Ago:

In August 1909 the Seattle Fire Department recorded 23 fires. Two were at restaurants and two at mill companies, with the remainder primarily at personal residences, with one each at a saloon, lodging house, laundry, stable, storage shed and butcher shop. Losses ranged from \$5 to \$5,000. The fire with a \$5 loss was started from a spark on a roof; the fire with a \$5,000 loss was a stable owned by Lehman Brothers and part of a much larger fire on Western Avenue. The most common cause of fires was "spark on room" followed by "defective chimney." *Seattle Fire Department, Record of Fires, Series 2804-03, Vol 1*

Fifty Years Ago:

In 1959, Claude Harris became the first African American hired in the Seattle Fire Department. A newspaper article from January 5 of that year recorded the event:

"After I passed the Civil Service examinations, I was surprised to learn that there never had been any Negro firemen," Harris said. "I suppose that now more members of my race will become interested," he said. The civil-service examinations included a written test of general intelligence, physical endurance tests and an interview. The smiling Harris had no need to worry about the physical qualifications. In good health, he is 6 feet 2 inches and weighs 205 pounds. Harris came to Seattle in 1953 from Washington, D.C. where he attended

Fifty Years Ago (cont.)

Howard University.... "Harris has a good future here," said Deputy Fire Chief William P. James. "There are real opportunities for advancement."

Claude Harris went on to become the first African American promoted to Fire Lieutenant, Fire Captain, Fire Battalion Chief, Deputy Fire Chief and Fire Chief.

Source for newspaper article: Seattle Fire Department Scrapbook, 2801-13, vol. 2.

Sources for Departmental History: Newsletters and Brochures

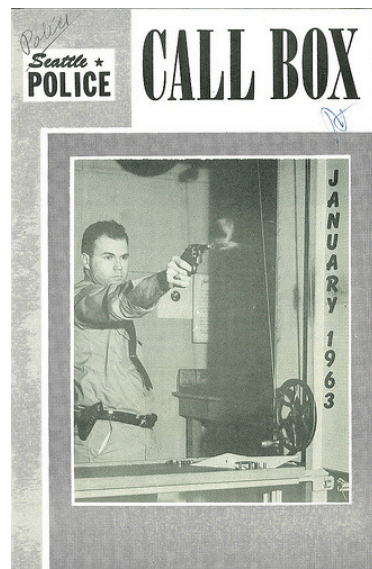
The last Gazette featured recently processed newsletters and brochures. These can be an excellent resource for research about employee culture and departmental changes. For example, our collection of Police Department publications (Record Series 6401-01) contains newsletters, brochures, and other materials produced from 1963 to 2007.

Employee newsletters range from three 1963 issues of "The Call Box" through "Seattle Police News" and "SPD Journal" from the 1970s to "The Blue Review" from 2001. These newsletters contain items of interest to SPD employees, including personnel news such as promotions and retirements; candid photos of employees at work and at departmental parties and other events; announcements of upcoming promotional exams; questions

and answers on legal issues; and news from various divisions within the department.

Other newsletters in the record series include "Community Policing," which relayed developments in that program; "Seattle Watch Backgrounder," with details about an accountability program; and "The Guardian," published by the Seattle Police Officers' Guild to share news from the union as well as articles and opinion about the police department.

Also in the collection are brochures and other handouts produced by SPD on topics ranging from burglary prevention and travel safety to



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Newsletters (cont.)

victim advocacy and police accountability. A subset of brochures published by the Office of Emergency Management deals with emergency preparedness and disaster recovery. SPD information packets on topics such as drugs, block watches, and false burglar alarms are also included. SMA holds similar collections for other departments. These can be valuable resources for anyone interested in a historical look at an agency's work, priorities, and employee culture.

Newly Processed at SMA

Due in part to the industrious labor of our Western Washington University intern Andrea McConchie, several collections have been added to the SMA Guide this summer.

Seattle Fire Department Scrapbooks

2801-13 1947-1979 19 volumes

Scrapbooks consisting of newspaper clippings of articles and photographs on topics related to the Fire Department. Most of the articles cover incidents to which the firefighters responded, including fires, car accidents and medical emergencies. Other articles relate to the fire department's involvement with specific propositions, initiatives, fire station closures and pay raises/cuts. Also included are articles about training, equipment, personal interest stories about firefighters and charitable causes. Other topics of historical interest that are covered in detail include the investigation of Captain Strom by the House Committee on Un-American Activities; Chief Vickery's career as Seattle City Light superintendent; the creation of Medic I and its funding issues; the rise of arson and the evolution of Seattle's Arson Unit; the controversial dismissal of Chief Richards and recall vote of Mayor Uhlman; and the introduction of women firefighters to the department.

Dates are written next to the clippings, but not the newspaper name, although most articles appear to be local. A small number of other types of materials are included, including some newsletters and some photographic prints.

Other recently processed SFD records include:

2802-07 Engine Company Roll Book

1892 -1896 1 volume

Daily logs of each fire fighter's hourly in and out status of Engine Company 6. Also includes some additional information such as supplies received and alarms or fires, as well as fire fighter substitutions.

Recently Processed (cont.)

2802-08 Engine Company Log Books

1905 -1949 6 volumes

Chronological log (dates and times) of the regular business of the Engine Company. Each volume is exclusive to a particular Engine Company with each volume containing differing amounts of detail. All include personnel information such as shift changes, officers on duty, days off, substitutions, payroll or sick/injured fire fighters. Almost all include some alarm and response information. Other information recorded includes hydrants which are in and out of service, neighborhood water shut-offs, drills performed, supplies received and equipment inspections. See Volume List for specific Engine Companies and time periods represented.

2804-03 Record of Fires

1894 -1924 20 volumes

Chronological record of fires in Seattle, including date, time, alarm, location, owner, description, cause, and information regarding the value and loss of building and contents. Monthly and yearly summaries are also included. Some volumes list responding Engine Companies.

2810-03 Building Inspections Log Book

1901 -1910 1 volume

For dates 1901 - April 1906, this volume is a chronological record of building inspections performed by the fire department. Types of violations include defective chimneys, fire escape obstructions, and improper disposal of rubbish. For dates 1907-1910, this volume contains monthly and yearly tallies of number and type of violations as well as Fire Losses and Insurance totals.

Seattle Fire Department Personnel Records

2802-06 1903-1969 66.4 cubic feet

Records of positions held, promotions, disciplines taken, civil service investigations, and extracurricular activities on behalf of the Fire Department. The records provide glimpses into the employees' personal lives, especially in the 1910s and 1920s, as the files include explanations for tardiness, communications with debtors, and reasons for resignations. The personnel files cover employees who worked less than a year to those who worked more than 50 years. Women began working in the department as clerical workers in larger numbers in the late 1950s. Most worked for a year or less; the files record their reasons for leaving which include pregnancy, school, health, or "to seek more suitable employment." An excellent source for genealogy, the Personnel Records contain information about how the Department functioned as well as insight into the lives of the employees in the Department.

Most Popular Summer Images

Visit SMA on Flickr! Three popular SMA images are described below:



Rainier

Avenue under construction, 1919.

SMA Item [6280](#).

Users are adding notes about where current businesses are located.

Before and after [photographs](#) of the second Denny Regrade are popular with viewers.

And the 2000 Kingdome implosion is entertaining many Flickr users this summer.



Kingdome, March 26, 2000

[Item 100486](#), [Seattle Municipal Archives](#).

Staff News

We wish work study students Breanna Menzies and Irina Mironyuk well. They graduated this past June after two years of valuable contributions to SMA. We are joined this summer by students John Ned and Kristen Ashpole.

Seattle Municipal Archives

600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 3, PO Box 94728
Seattle, WA 98124-4728
206 233-7807 or 206 684-8353
archives@seattle.gov <http://www.seattle.gov/CityArchives>