

Seattle City Light Columbia Basin "Z" Canyon Photograph Album, 1933

Overview of the Collection

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| Creator | Seattle City Light |
| Title | Seattle City Light Columbia Basin "Z" Canyon Photograph Album |
| Dates | 1933 (inclusive) 1933 1933 |
| Quantity | 1 volume |
| Collection Number | 1204-15 |
| Summary | Photographs of proposed Grand Coulee dam site on the Columbia River and surrounding area. |
| Repository | Seattle Municipal Archives Seattle Municipal Archives Office of the City Clerk City of Seattle PO Box 94728 98124-4728 Seattle, WA Telephone: 206-233-7807 Fax: 206-386-9025 archives@seattle.gov |
| Access Restrictions | Records are open to the public. |
| Languages | English |
| Sponsor | Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. |

Historical Note

Seattle City Light provides electricity and electrical and conservation services to its public and private customers. It is the largest public utility in the Pacific Northwest. Public responsibility for electrical energy dates to 1890 with creation of the Department of Lighting and Water Works. In 1902, Seattle voters passed a bond issue to develop hydroelectric power on the Cedar River under the administration of the Water Department. Electricity from this development began to serve Seattle in 1905. A City Charter amendment in 1910 created the Lighting Department. Under the leadership of Superintendent James D. Ross, the department developed the Skagit River hydroelectric project, which began supplying power in 1924. Both public and private power were supplied to Seattle until 1951 when the City purchased the private electrical power supply operations, making the Lighting Department the sole supplier. The Boundary Project in northeastern Washington began operations in 1967 and supplied over half of City Light's power generation. By the early 21st century, approximately ten percent of City Light's income came from the sale of surplus energy to customers in the Northwest and Southwest with the remainder of City Light's financial support coming from customer revenue. The current name of the agency was adopted in 1978 when the Department was reorganized.

Lack of rainfall in the western Columbia Plateau meant its farmland was difficult to work and yielded little. A plan for irrigation was necessary; however, the question of how to irrigate generated controversy for many years. While some favored a gravity canal irrigation system, others felt that a dam on the Columbia River at Grand Coulee was the best option. The dam supporters eventually won out when a 1932 Army Corps of Engineers survey supported their position, suggesting several dams on the Columbia River -- including the Grand Coulee Dam.

The dam was begun in 1933 with Public Works Administration funds. Although its initial purpose was to irrigate Central Washington farmlands, upon the dam's completion in 1942, it was used primarily to produce electricity needed for the war effort. After the war, the initial function of irrigation continued.

The 550-foot structure is North America's largest concrete dam and is used both for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation. The Grand Coulee Dam is a popular tourist attraction.

Content Description

The photograph album and accompanying map show proposed dam sites on the Columbia River and other areas in the Columbia basin. Pictured are valleys, plains, rivers, and gorges, an underground tunnel, and a footbridge across a gorge; men appear in some photographs. Included are photographs of proposed sites for Grand Coulee and "Z" Canyon dams, as well as "Z" Canyon, Latah Creek Valley, the city of Spokane, the Spokane River, and the Clark Fork of the Pend Oreille River. Several of the photographs are panoramas, and a detailed caption accompanies each photograph.

A set of images at the end of the album are copies of photographs made for Col. Hugh L. Cooper, circa 1916; many show the same or similar scenes as the 1933 photographs.

The album appears to have been prepared for J.D. Ross.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

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Administrative Information

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Gorges--Washington (State)--Photographs

Rivers--Washington (State)--Photographs

Corporate Names :

Grand Coulee Dam (Wash.)

Geographical Names :

Columbia River Watershed--Photographs

Columbia River--Photographs

Grand Coulee (Wash. : Coulee)--Photographs
Pend Oreille River--Photographs
Spokane River (Idaho and Wash.)--Photographs

Form or Genre Terms :

Photographic prints

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