

William Francis “Doc” Roach Papers, 1894-1965

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Roach, William Frank, 1891-1973
Title	William Francis “Doc” Roach Papers
Dates	1894-1965 (inclusive) 1894 1965
Quantity	1.0 linear feet, (2 boxes)
Collection Number	MSS 071
Summary	Chiefly photos relating to firefighting in Boise, Idaho; together with correspondence, clippings, and memorabilia.
Repository	Boise State University Library, Special Collections and Archives Special Collections and Archives 1910 University Drive Boise ID 83725 Telephone: 208-426-3958 archives@boisestate.edu
Access Restrictions	Collection is available for research.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities
Digital Objects	81 total - see all

Historical Note

William Frank Roach, known to friends and co-workers as 'Doc,' started with the Boise fire department in 1911. A fireman's hours were unbelievably long at that time - 21 hours a day for fifteen days before one got a day off. In addition to being a fireman, Doc trained and drove a team of fire horses. A number of anecdotes about those horses are found in the papers. After six years as a fireman he became an alarm dispatcher in 1917 and worked at this job for twenty five years. Promotion to Fire Prevention Captain came in 1947. Finally in 1951 he became Boise's first Fire Marshal, a post he held until retirement in 1965. At the time of his retirement Doc Roach was one of the very few surviving old time firemen who had known the days of horse-drawn fire engines as well as the more modern gasoline pump trucks.

As Fire Prevention Captain, Doc Roach conducted an annual fire prevention week and enrolled help from thousands of Boise school children. Lectures, school assemblies, parades, and clean up campaigns were conducted under his supervision. Photographs of these public relations efforts highlight his efforts and document the flavor of small town life in Boise during the first half of the twentieth century.

Doc traveled throughout the west during vacations. He visited Butte, Montana where he had grown up a number of times. During these travels and vacations he collected ball point and fountain pens. Many of

them were designed to advertise the business firms who gave them away. The pens are not part of the collection but were loaned to BSU for a special display during the summer of 1985.

Content Description

William Frank Roach had worked for the Boise City Fire Department for many years as a fireman and later became the fire marshal. The collection is a reflection of his many years with the department. He collected photographs which show the men, the equipment, the major fires, and fire prevention education in Boise.

The collection, though small, is a treasure trove of photographs documenting the history of Boise, Idaho's City Fire Department from 1911-1965. During that time Boise grew from a small town to a city. Photographs portray some of Boise's memorable fires, evolving fire equipment, firemen and efforts to educate the public about fire prevention. Most of the photos were taken in the downtown area. Many of the buildings shown have since disappeared under the onslaught of urban renewal. A few letters and newspaper clippings and narrative detail to Roach's career and to the history of the fire department.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[item description], W.F. "Doc" Roach Papers, Box [number] Folder [number], Boise State University Special Collections and Archives.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Lorraine Schubach, 1985.

Related Materials

Many of the photographs in the Roach collection were used in a book on the history of fire departments in Idaho by Arthur Hart - *Fire Fighting on the Frontier*.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box	Folder	
1	1	Biography: "This Is Your Life", miscellaneous newspaper clippings, etc.

Container(s)		Description	Dates
1	2	The Butte Fire Department (illustrated pamphlet)	1894
1	3	The Boise Fire Department (illustrated pamphlet)	1911
1	4	Boise City Fire Department - Equipment	
1	5	Boise City Fire Department - Fire Chiefs	
1	6	Boise City Fire Department - Firemen	
1	7	Boise City Fire Department - Groups	
1	8	Boise City Fire Department - Horses & dogs	
1	9	Boise City Fire Department - Stations	
1	10	Career photographs	
1	11	Fire Fighting Demonstrations	
1	12	Fires	undated
1	13	Fires (unidentified)	
1	14	Fires	1911-1912
1	15	Fires	1945
1	16	Fires	1946
1	17	Fires	1947
1	18	Fires	1948
1	19	Fires	1950
1	20	Fires	1951
1	21	Fires	1952
1	22	Fires. Sprouse Ritz	

Container(s)		Description	Dates
1	23	Fire Prevention Week	undated
1	24	Fire Prevention Week	1947
1	25	Fire Prevention Week	1948
1	26	Fire Prevention Week	1950
1	27	Fire Prevention Week	1951
1	28	Fire Prevention Week	1957
1	29	Fire Prevention Week	1958
1	30	Fire Prevention Week	1960
1	31	Idaho State Fire School	1951-1953
1	32	Miss Flame Contest	
2	3	Parades	
2	3	Retirement Photos	
2	4	Correspondence	1948-1965
2	5	Postcards. 'On the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad'	
2	5	Postcards. Butte, Montana	
2	5	Postcards. Boise, Idaho	
2	5	Postcards. Idaho	
2	5	Postcards. Various states	
2		Firemen's ribbons, badges and insigne	

[Map Case](#)

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Poster Cabinet	Oversize photographs of Boise fires, firemen, and fire stations	
Poster Cabinet	"A Salute to the Boise Fire Department" by J.R. Cunningham. <i>Boise Mirror</i>	1957 August 12

Find Related Collections

Subject Terms :

[Fire extinction--Idaho--Boise](#)

[Fire fighters--Idaho--Boise](#)