

Seattle Police Court Liquor Records, 1916-1926

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Washington (State). Municipal Court (Seattle)
Title	Seattle Police Court Liquor Records
Dates	1916-1926 (inclusive) 1916 1926
Quantity	11 volumes
Collection Number	5602
Summary	Police Court records relating to alcohol-related offenses during Prohibition.
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

Historical Note

Seattle's Police Court was the forerunner to the current Municipal Court. The first judicial officer for Seattle was appointed by the City Council in 1875 from among the King County Justices of the Peace serving the Seattle Precinct. In 1886, a charter amendment made each Seattle Precinct Justice a Police Justice with jurisdiction over ordinance violations. The 1890 Freeholders Charter officially established a Police Court in the city. This provision was repealed in 1892, after an 1891 state law created a Municipal Court system that included a Justice Court and Police Court.

The Police Court was a "court of limited jurisdiction" under the purview of the city of Seattle. (In contrast, the county was the parent agency for the Justice Court.) One of the justices of the peace in the Seattle Precinct was appointed to serve on the Police Court in addition to his duties on the Justice Court. The Police Court heard violations of state law that occurred within the city limits, as well as violations of City ordinances. It dealt with misdemeanors, traffic offenses, minor civil suits, and small claims, and also heard liquor-related cases during Prohibition.

The court was called by varying names over the years. Before 1891, it seems to generally have been known as the Police Court. From 1891 to 1897, it was called the Municipal Court, and then again was referred to as the Police Court until 1928, when it was once again called the Municipal Court. It retained that name from then on, except for 1954-1955, when it was called the Municipal Police Court.

The currently constituted Municipal Court was created in 1955 under Chapter 290 of the Washington State Laws. It has exclusive original jurisdiction over violations of all city ordinances, collects fines and forfeitures relating thereto, and hears cases related to misdemeanor defined by State statute that occur within the City limits. Municipal judges are elected by the qualified electors of the City of Seattle.

Prohibition in Washington State began in 1916, three years before the U.S. Constitution was amended to outlaw the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcohol on a national level. The state law was less draconian – county auditors were allowed to grant permits to import limited amounts of alcohol – but was still widely violated. Bootleggers and rumrunners did a thriving business supplying Washingtonians with illegal liquor, and many people built stills to manufacture their own. Until Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Seattle civic leaders cracked down on this activity to varying degrees. Mayor Hiram Gill was among the more severe, establishing a widely criticized “Dry Squad” to raid businesses and homes suspected of violating the ban.

Content Description

Court dockets and index dealing with liquor-related cases heard in the Police Court. Series are described more fully below.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[Item and date], [Title of collection], Record Series 5602-[XX]. Volume [number], Page [number]. Seattle Municipal Archives.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

The Seattle Police Court Liquor Records are arranged into two series:

5602-01: Docket Record of Liquor Cases, 1917-1926

5602-02: Liquor Docket Index, 1916-1926

Related Materials

Record series 5604-01 (Guide to the Seattle Justice Court Liquor Search Dockets, 1923-1944) documents liquor-related search warrants issued by the Justice Court during this era.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

5602-01: Docket Record of Liquor Cases, 1917-1926

10 volumes

Separate Police Court docket summarizing cases related to illegal possession of alcohol prosecuted under municipal and state prohibition laws. Volumes contain information on both court cases and search warrants. Case information includes case number, blotter number, defendant name and address, defense attorney, bail, date and details of complaint, plea, and judgment. Search warrant information includes date issued, date returned, officer's name, and items seized. Requests for search warrants seem to have decreased in the later years of this series.

Volume 1 is missing. Volume 11 contains shorter and less detailed forms than the earlier volumes.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Volume		
2	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1917/01-1917/08
3	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1917/08-1918/01
4	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1918/02-1918/07
5	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1918/07-1919/03
6	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1919/03-1919/08
7	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1919/08-1920/04
8	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1920/04-1920/12
9	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1920/12-1922/01
10	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1922/01-1924/04
11	Docket Record of Liquor Cases	1924/04-1926/02

5602-02: Liquor Docket Index, 1916-1926

1 volume

This index to the Docket Record of Liquor Cases (5602-01) lists cases related to illegal possession of alcohol by defendant name. Each entry includes the name and date, as well as the volume and page number where the case may be found in the Docket Record. Defendants are organized by first letter of their last name and then listed in order of their case number. Defendant names include both personal names and buildings (apartments, hotels, addresses). There are a large number of entries for the baggage rooms at King Street Station and Oregon & Washington Station (now known as Union Station).

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Volume		
1	Liquor Docket Index	1916-1926

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Alcoholic beverages--Washington (State)--Seattle

Law enforcement--Washington (State)--Seattle

Municipal courts--Washington (State)--Seattle

Prohibition--Washington (State)--Seattle

Corporate Names :

Washington (State). Municipal Court (Seattle)

Geographical Names :

Seattle (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Court records--Washington (State)--Seattle

Finding aid prepared by Julie Kerksen
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