

John J. McGilvra Papers, 1861-1926

Overview of the Collection

Creator	McGilvra, John J. (John Jay), 1827-1903
Title	John J. McGilvra Papers
Dates	1861-1926 (inclusive) 1861 1926
Quantity	3.62 cubic ft. (9 boxes and 1 oversize volume) 8 microfilm reels : positive ; 35 mm.
Collection Number	4806 (Accession No. 4806-001)
Summary	The John J. McGilvra Papers document the career of the lawyer, elected official, businessman, and civic activist and Washington State pioneer.
Repository	University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Special Collections University of Washington Libraries Box 352900 Seattle, WA 98195-2900 Telephone: 206-543-1929 Fax: 206-543-1931 speccoll@uw.edu
Access Restrictions	The collection is open to all users. The pages of the letterpress books are wrinkled and many are blurred.
Additional Reference Guides	
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was partially provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

Biographical Note

John Jay McGilvra was born in Livingston County, New York, in 1827 and moved with his family to Illinois in 1844. After teaching school for several years, he began reading law, was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1853, and entered private practice in Chicago. In 1861, McGilvra was appointed U.S. attorney for Washington Territory, a post he held until 1865, when he returned to private practice and politics. McGilvra was elected to the territorial legislature in 1866 as a Republican. The most notable accomplishment of his single term was the passage of enabling legislation for a wagon road over Snoqualmie Pass, the first trans-Cascade connection between eastern and western Washington. Following the Northern Pacific Railway's announcement in 1873 that Tacoma would be its West Coast terminus, he joined with other prominent Seattleites in organizing the Seattle & Walla Walla Railroad Company. Even after the failure of his railroad venture, McGilvra lobbied and litigated against the Northern Pacific and remained one of its most vocal critics.

McGilvra, one of the first attorneys in Seattle, spent most of his career in private practice but served a short time as city attorney. In addition to practicing law (he would eventually earn the title of "Judge"

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<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv74223>

as a tribute to his longevity), McGilvra speculated in real estate. He and his wife, Elizabeth, purchased a large tract of land bordering Lake Washington, becoming the first white settlers in what is now the Madison Park neighborhood in Seattle. He built what became Madison Street to link his property with downtown Seattle and organized the Madison Street Cable Railway Company. McGilvra was also an advocate of municipal improvement and civic reform in Seattle, remaining active in civic affairs even after his retirement in 1893. He was a primary backer of the Lake Washington Ship Canal and promoted the concept of bringing Cedar River water to Seattle. He and other community leaders established a Municipal League in 1894, although it was soon disbanded.

McGilvra's son Oliver was a successful Seattle lawyer. Daughter Caroline McGilvra, a philanthropist and avid collector of Native American artifacts, was married to Seattle pioneer Judge Thomas Burke, for whom the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture is named. John J. McGilvra died in 1903.

Content Description

The papers document the career of John J. McGilvra, a lawyer, elected official, businessman, and civic activist.

The general correspondence is arranged chronologically and spans the years 1861-1907. The contents relate to both personal and business topics. Letters from the early 1860s discuss matters arising from McGilvra's duties as U.S. attorney. They include the investigation of suspected embezzlement by the customs collector in Port Townsend, Washington, settlement of land claims, and enforcement of the Indian Intercourse Act. Letters from the 1870s and 1880s address McGilvra's legal battles with the Northern Pacific Railroad as well as his general legal business. Much of the correspondence from the 1890s until his death in 1903 deals with civic matters, including the Lake Washington Ship Canal and Cedar River water line, and Republican politics. Major correspondents include Caroline McGilvra Burke, George Goss, and Oliver McGilvra. The outgoing letters are in the form of five letterpress books, 1873 to 1890, from McGilvra's law practice. They include correspondence from McGilvra and Burke (1875-1876); McGilvra and Blaine (1885-1889); and McGilvra, Blaine, and DeVries (1889-1890), law partnerships McGilvra formed during the course of his career. They constitute a daily record of economic conditions, legal practice, and politics in the Puget Sound region.

Court papers, largely legal briefs and notes, are grouped by subject, with the balance being categorized as miscellaneous. The materials in this series represent the full range of McGilvra's law practice and include materials from his years practicing in Illinois. Legal documents include various contracts, article of incorporation, and affidavits. Also included are his reports as U.S. attorney for Washington Territory. The speeches and writings date largely from the 1870s and beyond and are grouped by topic, including the Lake Washington Ship Canal, Republican politics and Seattle municipal affairs, and the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. The series includes notes as well as complete speeches and writings.

The collection also contains several subgroups representing the papers of the McGilvra estate and several family members. There are also small subgroups containing the correspondence of McGilvra and Baxter, another of his law partnerships, and law partner Elbert F. Blaine. Blaine has been called the "father of the Seattle park system." Included in the Blaine subgroup is the 1903 report from the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Mass., to Blaine (in his capacity as chairman of the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners) outlining a comprehensive parks plan for the city.

The McGilvra collection also includes two 4-reel sets of positive microfilm which contain McGilvra's general correspondence and outgoing letters. The microfilm targets misidentify a few dates. The terminal date for reel 1 should be May 29, not June 2, and the starting date for reel 4 should be 1896 rather than 1895.

Use of the Collection

Alternative Forms Available

Portions of the John J. McGilvra Papers are available on microfilm, which may be borrowed through interlibrary loan.

Restrictions on Use

The creator's literary rights were not transferred to the University of Washington Libraries.

Administrative Information

Preservation Note

The pages of the letterpress books are wrinkled and many are blurred.

Acquisition Information

The John J. McGilvra Papers were a gift of the Thomas Burke estate in 1935.

Processing Note

The McGilvra Papers were part of a gift from the Thomas Burke estate which included the Thomas Burke Papers and Daniel H. Gilman Papers. The McGilvra Papers and the Gilman Papers were made separate collections. In 1965 each correspondence series was rearranged into a simple chronological sequence.

The microfilm in this accession was filmed from the originals in 1965 at the University of Washington under a grant from the National Historical Publications Commission.

Twenty photographic prints were transferred to the McGilvra Family Photograph Collection, PH. Coll. 487, in the Repository.

Two scrapbooks were relocated to the division's scrapbook collections in 1981. One is political; the other belonged to McGilvra's wife, Elizabeth, and contains clippings about her family, recipes, stories, jokes, and pressed flowers.

Bibliography

King County Bar Association, *Addresses upon the Life and Character of John J. McGilvra* (Seattle : Lowman & Hanford, 1904).

Doig, Ivan C., "*John J. McGilvra: the Life and Times of an Urban Frontiersman, 1827-1903*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1969).

Doig, Ivan C., "John J. McGilvra and Timber Trespass: Seeking a Puget Sound Timber Policy," *Forest History* , 12 Jan. 1970 (6-17).

Detailed Description of the Collection

Personal Papers

Container(s)	Description	Dates
General Correspondence		
Box/Folder		
1/1		1861-1862
1/2-4		1863
1/5		1864
1/6		1866
1/7		1868-1870
1/8		1871-1872
1/9-13		1873
1/14		1874
1/15		1875
1/16		1876
1/17		1877
1/18		1878
1/19		1879
1/20		1880
1/21		1881
1/22		1882

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/23		1884
1/23-25		1885
1/26-27		1886
1/28-30		1887
1/31-34		1888
1/35-38		1889
1/39-40		1890
1/41-42		1891
1/43-44		1892
1/44		1892
1/45		1893
1/46		1894
1/47-50		1895
1/51-54		1896
2/1		1897
2/2-4		1898
2/5-9		1899
2/10-11		1900
2/12-13		1901
2/14-17		1902
2/18-19		1903

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2/20		1906-1907
2/21-23	No Dates	n.d.
2/24	Unidentified	n.d.

Outgoing Letters - Letterpress Books

Box

2	Volume 1	Jun. 1873-Aug. 1878
2	Volume 2	Nov. 1875-Dec. 1879
2	Volume 3	Jan. 1880-Nov. 1882
3	Volume 4	Apr. 1883-Aug. 1885
3	Volume 5	Sept. 1887-Dec. 1890

Court Papers

Box/Folder

4/1	Cook County, Illinois Practice	1853-1860
4/2	Re: Daniel Bagley	
4/3	Re: Dexter Horton and Company	
4/4	Re: Northern Pacific Railroad Company	
4/5	Re: City of Seattle	
4/6	Re: Seattle & Walla Walla Railroad Company	
4/7	Re: University of Washington Lands	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
4/8	Re: Henry Yesler	
4/9	General	
4/10	Court Papers Involving Northern Pacific Railroad Company	
4/11-14	[Missing]	
4/15	Miscellaneous Papers	
5/1-5/8	Miscellaneous Briefs (A-V)	
6/1	Miscellaneous Briefs (W-S)	
6/2-3	Miscellaneous Briefs (unnamed)	
6/4	Re: Wills	
Legal Documents		
Box/Folder		
6/5	Affidavits	
Articles of Incorporation, Constitutions, By-laws, etc. (copies)		
Box/Folder		
6/6	Lake Washington and Seattle Coal Road Company	1867
6/6	Meigs Lumber and Ship Building Company	
6/6	Seattle and Lake Washington Waterway Company	1893?
6/6	Seattle Real Estate Board	
6/6	Seattle Traction Company	
6/6	Municipal League of Seattle	1896
Box/Folder		

Container(s)	Description	Dates
6/7	Contracts	
6/8	Contracts (Agreements)	
6/9	Book Inventories	1861, 1890
6/10	Licenses, etc. re: Trading with Indians	1873, 1875
6/11	Notice of Estray	1884
6/12	Seattle Ordinances	
6/13	Report: Trespass on Public Lands by Logging Companies	1864
6/14-15	Reports as U.S. District Attorney	1861-1865
6/16	Specifications for Construction	1859-1903
6/17	Surety Bonds	1875-1890
6/18	Miscellaneous	
Financial Records		ca. 1870-1900
Box/Folder		
6/19	Miscellaneous re: Seattle Municipal Finances	
6/20	Miscellaneous Receipts	
6/21-22	Miscellaneous	
Speeches and Writings		
Box/Folder		
7/1	Re: Alaska Boundary Dispute	1898-1899
7/2-3	Re: Lake Washington Canal	ca.1895-1903
7/4	Re: Legislative Bills	ca.1870-1900

Container(s)	Description	Dates
7/5	Re: Madison Street Cable Railway Company	ca.1865-1900
7/6-7	Re: Northern Pacific Railroad Company	1876-1877
7/8	Re: Republican Party	ca.1870-1903
7/9-10	Re: Seattle Municipal Affairs and Politics	ca.1870-1903
7/11	Re: Politics - General	ca. 1870-1903
7/12	Re: Washington Pioneer Society	
7/13	Re: People	
7/14	Miscellaneous: (Genealogical Tree for Jacob Wiebens)	
7/15	"Territorial Expansions" and "Immigration and Kindred Topics"	
7/16	Miscellaneous	

McGilvra, John Jay, Estate Papers

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Correspondence		
<i>Box/Folder</i>		
7/17	Miscellaneous	1923
7/18	To: Lowman, J.D.	1923-1924
7/19-24	To: McGilvra, Mrs. Elizabeth M. From: McGilvra, O.C.	1904-1926
8/1	To: McGilvra, Mrs. E.M. From: McGilvra Estate	1913-1922
8/2	To: McGilvra, Mrs. E.M. From: Miscellaneous	1910-1923
8/3	To: McGilvra, O.C. From: A. H. Reid & Co.	1922-1923
8/4	To: McGilvra, O.C. From: Seattle Title Trust Co.	1922-1924

Container(s)	Description	Dates
8/5	To: McGilvra, O.C. From: Miscellaneous	1919-1928
8/6	To: Burke, Mrs. C.E. From: McGilvra Estate	1912-1926
8/7	To: A.H. Reid & Co. From: Miscellaneous	1922-1923
8/8	To: Seattle Title Trust Co. From: Miscellaneous	1919-1923
8/9	To: Washington State Commissioner of Public Lands From: McGilvra Estate	1920-1927
8/10	To: Wright, G.E. From: McGilvra Estate	n.d., 1920-1922
8/11	To: Miscellaneous From: McGilvra Estate	1916-1930
Box/Folder		
8/12	Agreements	
8/13	Assignments	
8/14	Certificates	
8/15-16	Contracts	
8/17	Indentures	
8/18	Legal Papers	
8/19	Memoranda	
8/20	Notes - Financial	
8/21	Powers of Attorney	
8/22	Real Estate Contracts	
8/23	Real Estate - Price Lists	
8/24	Receipts	
8/25-26	Reports	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
8/27	Statements	
8/28	Wills	
9/1-3	Financial - Miscellaneous	
9/4	McGilvra Family Documents	
9/5	McGilvra, O.C. - Miscellaneous	

Volume:Oversize

10	Journal	1903-1916
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McGilvra, Elizabeth M.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Incoming Correspondence		
Box/Folder		
9/6	Canadian Bank of Commerce	1918-1920
9/7	Jones, Juliet E. (Hills)	n.d., 1904, 1907
9/8	Lyon, L.K.	n.d.
9/9	Moyer, Carrie, E.	1918, 1920, n.d.
9/10	Miscellaneous (A-Z)	1903-1920
Box/Folder		
9/11	Outgoing Correspondence	1920
9/12	Deed, Contract	
9/13-14	Financial Records	
9/15	Notes - Financial	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
9/16	Receipts	
9/17	Statements	
9/18	Tax Notices	
9/19	Wills	
9/20	Miscellany	

McGilvra, Ethel

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
9/21	Incoming Correspondence - Letter from K.B. Scott	1890-1894, 1917, 1926, n.d.

McGilvra, Oliver C.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
9/22	Incoming Correspondence	1900-1910
9/23-24	Outgoing Correspondence	1844-1926, n.d.

McGilvra, Lillian L.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
9/25	Incoming Correspondence	1915
9/26	Autograph Book	
9/26	Notebook	

McGilvra and Baxter, Attorneys

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
9/27	Incoming Correspondence	1873-1875

Blaine, Elbert F.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
General Correspondence		
Box/Folder		
9/28	Edmiston, J.K	1893
9/28	Hale, H.C.	1888
9/28	Kreisher, Philip H.	1886
9/28	Magers, J.E	1888
9/28	Montgomery, Alex	1888
9/28	Nicolai Brother Co.	1888
9/28	Olmsted Brothers (Report to Park Commissioners)	1905
9/28	Seavey, Abbie J.	1888
9/28	U.S. Pension Agency	1888

Microfilm

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Reel		
1	Letterpress Copybooks, vol. 1-3 complete	1873-1882

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1	Letterpress Copybooks, vol. 4, pp. 1-110 (Apr. 16, 1883 - May 29, 1884)	1883-1884
2	Letterpress Copybooks, vol. 4, pp. 111-end (Jun. 2, 1884 - Sept. 5 1887)	1884-1887
2	Letterpress Copybooks, vol. 5, pp. 1-441 (Sept. 9, 1887 - Sept. 21, 1889)	1887-1889
3	Letterpress Copybooks, vol. 5, pp. 442-end (Oct. 5, 1889 - Aug. 21, 1890)	1889-1890
3	General Correspondence (Jul. 8, 1861 - Dec. 16, 1895)	1861-1895
4	General Correspondence (1896 - 1903)	1896-1903
4	General Correspondence, Undated and Unidentified	

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Businessmen--Washington (State)--Archives
 Government attorneys--Washington (State)--Archives
 Indians of North America--Washington (State)--Government relations
 Legislators--Washington (State)--Archives
 Railroads--Washington (State)
 Water-supply--Washington (State)--Seattle

Personal Names :

Goss, George
 McGilvra, Caroline Burke
 McGilvra, John J. (John Jay), 1827-1903--Archives
 McGilvra, Oliver C

Corporate Names :

Northern Pacific Railroad Company
 Republican Party (Wash.)
 Seattle & Walla Walla Railroad

Geographical Names :

Cedar River Reservoir (King County, Wash.)
 Lake Washington Ship Canal (Seattle, Wash.)
 Seattle (Wash.)--Politics and government--19th century
 Seattle (Wash.)--Race relations--19th century
 Washington (State)--Officials and employees

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