

# Fred G. Christensen collection on Seattle World's Fair construction projects, 1960-1962

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Collector</b>	Christensen, Fred G., 1927-2005
<b>Title</b>	Fred G. Christensen collection on Seattle World's Fair construction projects
<b>Dates</b>	1960-1962 (inclusive) 1960 1962
<b>Quantity</b>	.21 cubic feet, (1 box including 76 photographs)
<b>Collection Number</b>	2004.48 (accession)
<b>Summary</b>	Photographs collected by Fred Christensen documenting major construction projects for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. The collection also contains print materials relating specifically to lighting on the fairgrounds.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Museum of History &amp; Industry, Sophie Frye Bass Library</a> Sophie Frye Bass Library Museum of History & Industry P.O. Box 80816 Seattle, WA 98108 Telephone: 206-324-1126 Fax: 206-780-1533 <a href="mailto:library@mohai.org">library@mohai.org</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	The collection is open to the public by appointment.
<b>Languages</b>	English.

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## Biographical Note

Fred G. Christensen (1927-2005) worked as Assistant Director of Site Development for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. From there he went on to a 25 year career with Westin Hotels, attaining the position of Director of Design and Construction. Christensen was a graduate of Lincoln High School, and served in the Navy from 1944-1947. He graduated from the University of Washington in 1950 with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering.

A long-time resident of Mercer Island, Fred Christensen and his wife Evelyn were married in 1948, and had four children.

## Content Description

The collection consists primarily of 8x10 black and white photographs that document progress on construction projects at the 1962 Seattle World's Fair (Century 21 Exposition). The aerial photographs

show specific construction sites and panoramic views of the surrounding city in the early 1960s, before and during construction.

The main focus of the aerial series is the Washington State Coliseum (Key Arena), taken during the summer of 1960 by Jesse Ebert Photographers, 3225 California Ave. S.W. Seattle. A second series of photographs from approximately the same time period includes ground and other elevated views of the Space Needle, Science Pavilion and Monorail construction sites. These were taken by Forde Photographers, 306 Fairview N., Seattle.

The collection also includes a Century 21 staff list and a 1962 issue of the General Electric "Light" periodical, containing an article about lighting on the fairgrounds. There is also a conference paper titled "Outdoor Lighting at the Seattle World's Fair," presented at the September 1962 Illuminating Engineers Conference, Dallas, Texas.

## Historical Background

The Seattle World's Fair (Century 21 Exposition) opened on April 21, 1962 and offered a wide range of exhibits and entertainments, requiring extensive grounds and facilities near downtown Seattle. The fairground construction and renovation projects involved years of city planning, but several projects, including the Space Needle, Monorail and Washington State Coliseum were completed in a relatively short 18-month timeframe.

During the planning process, several sites were reviewed for the Exposition, but the lower Queen Anne area had been considered for a "civic center" as early as 1919. The Civic Auditorium (later Opera House) and the Ice Arena (later Mercer Arena) were built in 1927 based on that long-term plan. Some of the other land occupied by the fair was originally donated to the city by James Osburn (1881) and David Denny (1889.) Two lots at Third Ave. N. and John St. were purchased from St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church. Warren Avenue School, a public elementary school with a popular special education program, was torn down and provided the site for the Washington State Coliseum (now Key Arena.) Some of Seattle's oldest houses, apartments and commercial buildings were also demolished to create space for the fair.

The city provided Century 21 with land and buildings conservatively valued at 14 million, and made a long-term investment in the proposed "civic center" through bonds and matching funds from the state legislature and federal government. The chief fair architect was Paul Thiry, who designed one of the largest centerpieces, the Washington State Coliseum (now Key Arena). A groundbreaking ceremony for the Coliseum was held on May 12, 1960, launching a major construction project by Howard S. Wright. The remodeled Key Arena still maintains the architectural integrity of the original building's support structure and roof.

The proposed Space Needle had no land on which to be built until 1961, when a plot containing switching equipment for the fire and police departments was sold for \$75,000. The 605 foot Space Needle was built to withstand severe earthquakes and Category 5 hurricane force winds, and construction started in May 1961. A nearby armory building was remodeled, and became the large Food Circus (now Center House.) The United States Science Pavilion (now Pacific Science Center) was designed and constructed largely with federal funding. Construction on the Monorail line began in April 1961 by Alweg Rapid Transit Systems, who won the bid when they offered to underwrite the entire 4.5 million cost of construction. The Monorail elevated track was built along Fifth Avenue, and covered a mile long route to the fairgrounds from a station in Westlake Park, which originally formed a lid over the park.

More than half the structures were torn down when the fair ended in October 1962, but the fair left behind numerous public works, including the Coliseum, Monorail, Space Needle, Opera House, Center House and Science Pavilion. As originally planned, the new "Seattle Center" became a lasting cultural heritage for the region.

## Use of the Collection

### Alternative Forms Available

View selections from the collection in digital format by clicking on the camera icons in the inventory below.

### Restrictions on Use

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### Preferred Citation

The Fred G. Christensen Collection on Seattle World's Fair Construction Projects, Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

## Administrative Information

### Location of Collection

2a.3.8

### Acquisition Information

Gift of Fred Christensen, via his wife Evelyn; received on October 6, 2004.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

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

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Folder		
1	2004.48.1.1-1.9: Aerial views of the Washington State Coliseum construction site Jesse Ebert Photography (photographer) 9 photographs 8" x 10"	circa 1960 June

Fred G. Christensen collection on Seattle World's Fair construction projects, 1960-1962  
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv75686>

Container(s)	Description	Dates
	<p>The photographs depict a series of aerial views of the Washington State Coliseum early construction site. Includes long-range views of the surrounding city, and close-in aerial views of excavation, equipment, temporary structures and construction supplies in place shortly after groundbreaking ceremonies in May 1960.</p>	
2	<p>2004.48.2.1-2.10: Aerial views of fair construction site<a href="#">[view]</a>  Jesse Ebert Photography (photographer)  10 photographs 8" x 10"  Aerial photographs giving an overview of the entire Century 21 site and surrounding area, with emphasis on the Washington State Coliseum construction site. Also includes aerial views of the original Civic Auditorium, Ice Arena, and Amory prior to renovation.</p>	circa 1960 June
3	<p>2004.48.3.1-3.10: Aerial views of the Washington State Coliseum construction site  Jesse Ebert Photography (photographer)  10 photographs 8" x 10"  Aerial views of the Washington State Coliseum construction site showing views of the wood concrete pour scaffolding, and the first concrete V-shaped pillars.</p>	circa 1960 July
4	<p>2004.48.4.1-4.15: Aerial views of the Washington State Coliseum construction site<a href="#">[view]</a>  Jesse Ebert Photography (photographer)  15 photographs 8" x 10"  Aerial views of the Coliseum construction site, depicting the completed concrete V-shaped pillars, with 5 still encased in wood scaffolding.</p>	circa 1960 August
5	<p>2004.48.5.1-5.5: Aerial view of fairgrounds and Washington State Coliseum construction site  Jesse Ebert Photography (photographer)  5 photographs 8" x 10"  Series depicts long range aerial views of the fairgrounds area and close in views of the Coliseum construction site, showing all the completed V-shaped concrete pillars, and the building façade erected.</p>	circa 1960 September
6	<p>2004.48.6.1-6.3: Space Needle construction<a href="#">[view]</a>  Forde Photographers (photographer)  3 photographs 8" x 10"  Photographs of Space Needle excavation showing steel support framework; Space Needle central support column, with crane and scaffolding; and the first two steel beam supporting</p>	circa 1961 June

Container(s)	Description	Dates
	"legs" and central supporting column under construction, framed by a Science Pavilion gothic arch.	
7	2004.48.7.1-7.4: U.S. Science Pavilion construction <a href="#">[view]</a> Forde Photographers (photographer) 4 photographs 8" x 10" Interior and exterior construction views of the U.S. Science Pavilion exterior walls, gothic arches, and roof.	1961
8	2004.48.8.1-8.11: Washington State Coliseum construction <a href="#">[view]</a> Forde Photographers (photographer) 11 photographs 8" x 10" Construction views of Washington State Coliseum showing reinforcing girders, concrete support structures and steel/ concrete roof	circa 1961 January
8	2004.48.8.12-8.14: Coliseum concrete support structures and base Forde Photographers (photographer) 3 contact sheets with 4 images each 8" x 10"	1961 January 9 and 27, 1961 February 6
9	2004.48.9.1-9.5: Monorail construction <a href="#">[view]</a> <a href="#">[view]</a> Forde Photographers (photographer) 5 photographs 8" x 10" Elevated view of Fifth Ave. showing completed concrete support columns for monorail track; construction crew working at the base of monorail concrete support columns; crane erecting monorail concrete support column; and elevated Fifth Ave. view of monorail support columns encased in scaffolding before raising.	circa 1961 June
10	2004.48.10.1: Interior view of the demolition of the Civic Auditorium stage proscenium during renovation Forde Photographers (photographer) 1 photograph 8" x 10"	1961
11	2004.48.11: Century 21 Staff lists	1961 April and July
12	2004.48.12.1: "Outdoor Lighting at Seattle World's Fair-Century 21" Conference paper titled prepared for presentation at Illuminating Engineering Society Technical Conference, Dallas, Texas.	1962 September

Container(s)	Description	Dates
12	2004.48.12.2: Issue of General Electric's quarterly periodical <i>Light</i> featuring an article on fairground lighting	1962

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Architecture--Washington (State)--Seattle  
 Building sites--Washington (State)--Seattle  
 Building--Washington (State)--Seattle  
 KeyArena (Seattle, Wash.)  
 Space Needle (Seattle, Wash.)

### Corporate Names :

Century 21 Exposition (1962 : Seattle, Wash.)

### Geographical Names :

United States--Washington (State)--Seattle

### Form or Genre Terms :

Aerial photographs  
 Photographs

### Other Creators :

#### Corporate Names :

Forde Photographers  
 (creator)  
 Jesse Ebert Photographers  
 (creator)

Finding aid prepared by Sue Terrible.  
 2010



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