

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records, 1924-1992

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Washington Public Utility Districts' Association
Title	Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records
Dates	1924-1992 (inclusive) 1924 1992
Quantity	95.70 cubic feet (129 boxes including 1 sound disc)
Collection Number	0181
Summary	Records, correspondence and administrative papers of the Association
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	Consult the access restrictions information for each of the accessions listed below.
Additional Reference Guides	
Languages	English

Historical Note

The Washington Public Utility Districts' Association has long been the political and research arm of public utility districts (PUDs). The group formed in 1936 as the Washington Public Utility Commissioners' Association. It was the first association of public utilities in the United States. The Association originally spent most of its time doing research and assisting political campaigns to create PUDs and get them running. It also coordinated successful fights against two initiatives (Initiative 139 in 1940 and Initiative 166 in 1946) designed to make it more difficult for PUDs to buy property.

PUDs could be created by a county-wide vote, but they came into existence without property. PUDs could acquire the property of private power companies in two ways--through a negotiated sale or through a condemnation suit, a procedure that forced the company to sell its assets to the PUD at what the county court determined to be a fair price. Some advocates of public power favored condemnation, while others thought negotiated sale was the only ethical way to put a PUD in business. This difference of opinion nearly split the Public Utility Commissioners' Association. Association President Harry Pierson was forced to resign in 1942 after he took a trip to the East Coast funded by investment bankers who favored the negotiated purchase strategy. The Association then fell under the control of the Washington Public Ownership League (WPOL). WPOL sponsored Initiative 12 to expedite the

condemnation process by allowing many PUDs to join together and condemn an entire company in a single suit. This measure passed the state legislature in 1943, but private power firms collected enough signatures to hold a referendum (Referendum 25) on the law in 1944. The divisions in the public power movement contributed to the narrow defeat of the measure. WPOL further frustrated its critics by endorsing a socialist candidate for state senate and using the Commissioners' Association office as his campaign headquarters. WPOL's control ended in 1947, when the Association elected its leaders from the ranks of the avowedly anti-socialist Public Power League of Washington

Ken Billington, former head of the Public Power League of Washington, was elected Executive Secretary of the Commissioners' Association in 1951. Billington changed the name of the group to the Washington Public Utility Districts' Association (WAPUDA). Since most PUDs had already bought out private power companies and begun selling electricity, Billington redefined the mission of the organization. Instead of concentrating on getting fledgling PUDs into business, WAPUDA began to focus on doing research and lobbying on the problems of PUDs already in operation. Under Billington's tenure, WAPUDA helped PUDs band together to purchase insurance at low rates and to conduct joint labor negotiations.

WAPUDA was a major player in all the big public vs. private power conflicts in the Pacific Northwest. It endorsed the creation of a Columbia Valley Authority and the building of additional federal dams, such as John Day and Ice Harbor. WAPUDA led the failed effort to convince Congress to authorize a federal Hells Canyon High Dam. WAPUDA successfully lobbied the Federal Power Commission (FPC) to allow PUDs to build their own dams. In the 1960s WAPUDA derailed the proposed Columbia River Interstate Treaty, which would have weakened the law that gave public utilities preference in the allocation of power from federal dams. WAPUDA instead supported the legislation that became the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980. This law renewed PUDs' contracts with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and reinforced public utilities' preferential rights to federal power. The law also created the Pacific Northwest Power Planning Council and mandated conservation as the preferred way of meeting the region's future power needs.

WAPUDA was also the driving force behind the creation of the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS). WPPSS was designed to build power plants that individual PUDs could not afford on their own. WAPUDA convinced the Washington Department of Conservation and Development to charter WPPSS in 1957. In 1966 WAPUDA got approval for its plan to turn one of Hanford's plutonium-making reactors into a power-producing nuclear plant operated by WPPSS. In the 1970s WAPUDA helped WPPSS gain federal authorization to build five nuclear power plants simultaneously. WAPUDA also joined private power companies in defeating antinuclear Initiative 325 in 1976. Due to declining power demand and cost overruns, WPPSS completed only one of its five proposed nuclear plants. In 1983 WPPSS announced it could not pay its creditors, triggering the largest municipal bond default in American history.

Content Description

Consult the scope and content information for each accession listed below.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

Consult the restrictions governing reproduction and use for each of the accessions listed below.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

WAPUDA donated accession 0181-001 in 1961 and added to it in 1973. WAPUDA added nine other gifts between 1980 and 1991; in 1993 these were merged into a single accession, number 0181-013. Ken Billington donated 6 cubic feet of papers in 1992; these became accession 0181-012. Each of the three accessions has an inventory, which is fortunate since each is organized quite differently.

Processing Note

As a general rule, accession 0181-001 contains records from 1939 to 1953, while accessions 0181-012 and 181-013 hold records from 1953 to 1982. There are, however, three major exceptions to this pattern. First, letters from 1950 to 1962 are found in all three accessions. Second, accession 0181-013 contains material on the anti-PUD initiatives of the 1940s. Third, accession 0181-013 contains all WAPUDA press releases, engineering reports, and proceedings of PUD hearings before the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Although accession 0181-012 is the smallest of the three accessions, it contains much valuable material on the history of public power. Accession 0181-012 primarily consists of the files Ken Billington kept while Executive Secretary of W APUDA and while researching his book, *People, Politics & Public Power*. The historical features series contains a chronology of the development of PUDs in Washington State, as well as copies of magazine articles and other publications on the history of public power. Correspondence with a few individuals and Billington's letters to newspaper editors have been placed in their own folders. Most correspondence in this accession, however, is found in the general correspondence series, the subject series, or the chronological files. The chronological files make up the bulk of this accession; they contain agendas of W APUDA meetings, drafts of resolutions, and some reports and correspondence regarding subjects discussed at the meetings. These chronological files were not processed extensively since they partially duplicate material in accession 0181-013. Important subgroups in this accession include: Billington's personal papers; material on WPPSS from the 1970s and early 1980s; and material on the Public Power Council, a multi-state group that worked on the Northwest Power Act of 1980. The personal papers subgroup contains Billington's correspondence and speeches made after his retirement in 1978, almost all of which deal with public power issues.

Letters in accession 0181-013 may be located in several different places. Correspondence with many individuals and agencies have been placed in separate folders and sorted by name. The general correspondence series primarily contains correspondence with member PUDs. Other letters are found in the incoming and outgoing letters series or in the topically-organized subject files. The subject files make up the majority of accession 0181-13; they include all sorts of correspondence, reports, handwritten memoranda, and newspaper clippings. The legislation series is a particularly important part of this accession; it documents the anti-PUD initiatives of the 1940s, federal bills from 1942 to 1982, and state bills from 1953 to 1983. This accession has many subgroups devoted to organizations in which W APUDA participated, allied public power groups, and the committees and regional chapters of W APUDA. Most noteworthy is the large WPPSS subgroup that includes WPPSS minutes from 1957 to 1974, correspondence, and transcripts of FPC hearings.

Related Materials

Newer W APUDA and WPPSS records, as well as more complete copies of the organizations' minutes, may be found at W APUDA headquarters in Seattle. W APUDA also has a very large collection of newspaper clippings and other publications on public power in Washington. This collection is especially helpful since, although there are several books on the movement for public power at the federal level, little research has been done on the struggle at the state level. The only . book that treats the subject in detail is Ken Billington, *People, Politics, & Public Power* (Seattle: W APUDA, 1988).

Special Collections of the University of Washington Libraries has other collections documenting the history of public power in Washington: the records of individual Washington PUDs (too many accessions to list); the records of the PUDs' law firm, Houghton, Cluck, Coughlin & Schubat (Mss. Coll. 0384); and the papers of the PUDs' chief engineer, Robert W. Beck (Mss. Coll. 0981, 4291). Material related to WPPSS in the 1970s and 1980s may be found in the very small WPPSS collection (Mss. Acc. Nos 1894-001, 1894-002). The best source of information on the Washington Public Ownership League is probably the papers of its secretary, Lillian Sylten Spear (Mss. Coll. 0381). In addition, Special Collections has nearly complete runs of the WPOL and WAPUDA newsletters, both titled *Public Power News*. Special Collections also has copies of the annual publication of R.W. Beck and Associates, *Facts and Statistics: Twenty-Two Public Utility Districts in Washington, 1954-82*.

Those interested in federal or regional public power issues could also consult the records of the Northwest Public Power Association (Mss. Coll. 0214, 1674); the papers of Hugh B. Mitchell (Mss. Coll. 0281, 0818, 0927); and the papers of Washington's US Senators (too many accessions to list). The Northwest Public Power Association was an organization of public utilities in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska; it frequently allied with WAPUDA on federal power issues. Hugh Mitchell served as president of the League for the Columbia Valley Authority and helped lead the fight for a federal Hells Canyon High Dam.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Accession No. 0181-001: Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records, 1936-1961

23.00 cubic feet (55 boxes)

Scope and Content: Records.

[View inventory/container list for this accession](#)

Restrictions on Access: Open to all users.

Restrictions on Use: Literary rights of representatives of the records-creating organization transferred to the University of Washington Libraries.

Acquisition Info: Donated by WA PUD Assoc., 8/3/1961.

[View inventory/container list](#)

Description

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records, 1924-1992
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv80343>

Accession No. 0181-012: Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records, 1948-1990

6.00 cubic feet (6 boxes)

Scope and Content: Correspondence, speeches and writings, research material, agenda, minutes, statistics, clippings, testimony. Primarily files of executive secretary Ken Billington. Includes Billington's personal papers and research for his 1988 book, "People, Politics and Public Power."

[View inventory/container list for this accession](#)

Restrictions on Access: Open to all users.

Restrictions on Use: Billington's literary rights transferred to Libraries.

Processing Info: These records are Ken Billington's own office files created during his tenure as Executive Director of WAPUDA. Some may duplicate records found in other WAPUDA accessions, which were general office files. For this reason, the chronological files (boxes 3-5) were not refoldered. These files were compared to the minutes series and Billington "mailings" series in Accession No. 0181-010 and no duplication was found.

No attempt was made to subgroup the chronological correspondence files. Some of these letters may more properly represent Billington's activities with other organizations. Names of correspondents were entered into the CNI from the chronological files as well as the individual name folder, and may not appear in the inventory.

Billington retired from WAPUDA in 1978. Material date beyond that time can be characterized as personal papers. The letters to the editor series has been divided between the WAPUDA records and Personal Papers at the date of Billington's retirement. No attempt was made to divide the papers in other record series or subgroups. Nearly all of the records reflect Billington's activities in the field of public power, both with WAPUDA, and later as a consultant and author.

Two folders were added to the subgroup., Cirizens Committee on Washington Courts, in the summer of 1955. They were transferred from Accession No. 0181-013.

Acquisition Info: Donated by Ken Billington, 11/12/1992.

[View inventory/container list](#)

Description

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records

Accession No. 0181-013: Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records 1924-1990, 1924-1992 (bulk 1938-1992)

66.70 cubic feet (68 boxes including one sound disc)

Scope and Content: Correspondence, minutes, reports, historical writings, legislation, labor negotiations, subject series, financial records, testimony and statements, advertisements, clippings, ephemera, press releases, student papers, newsletters, phonodisc, by-laws, committee records. Concerns activities of the association on behalf of member PUD's, lobbying, and advocating public

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records, 1924-1992
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv80343>

power projects. Also documents WAPUDA's role in the creation and operation of the Washington Public Power Supply System.

[View inventory/container list for this accession](#)

Restrictions on Access: Open to all users.

Restrictions on Use: Creator's literary rights transferred to the University of Washington Libraries.

Acquisition Info: Donated by Washington Public Utility Districts' Association, 3/13/1980.

[View inventory/container list](#)

Description

Washington Public Utility Districts' Association records 1924-1990

Names and Subjects

Personal Names :

Brewer, William A

Corporate Names :

Association of Washington Cities
Columbia Basin Inter-Agency Committee
Columbia Interstate Compact Commission
El Paso Natural Gas Company
Electric Power Research Institute
Electric Research Council
Idaho Power Company
Inland Empire Waterways Association
Pacific Power and Light Company
Tacoma (Wash.). Dept. of Public Utilities. Light Division
Washington Public Utility Districts' Association--Archives
Washington Water Power Company

Geographical Names :

Hanford Nuclear Power Plant

Other Creators :

Personal Names :

Billingsley, Kirby
(creator)
Billington, Ken, 1916-
(creator)
Bone, Homer Truett, 1883-1970
(creator)
Ely, Northcutt
(creator)
Jackson, Henry M. (Henry Martin), 1912-1983
(creator)
Magnuson, Warren G. (Warren Grant), 1905-1989
(creator)

Mitchell, Hugh B. (Hugh Burnton), 1907-
(creator)

Terrel, John U
(creator)

Corporate Names :

American Public Power Association
(creator)

Chelan County Public Utility District No. 1 (Wash.)
(creator)

Columbia Valley Authority
(creator)

Electric Consumers Information Committee (Washington, D.C.)
(creator)

Grant County Public Utility District (Wash.)
(creator)

Grays Harbor County Public Utility District (Wash.)
(creator)

National Grange
(creator)

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
(creator)

Northwest Power Planning Council (U.S.)
(creator)

Northwest Public Power Association
(creator)

Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee
(creator)

Puget Sound Power and Light Company
(creator)

Seattle (Wash.). Dept. of Lighting
(creator)

Seattle Chamber of Commerce
(creator)

Thomas, Christy & Associates
(creator)

United States. Bonneville Power Administration
(creator)

United States. Bureau of Reclamation
(creator)

United States. Federal Power Commission
(creator)

Washington (State). Thermal Power Plant Evaluation Council
(creator)

Washington Public Power Supply System
(creator)

Washington Public Utility District Commissioners Association
(creator)

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Personal Papers/Corporate Records (University of Washington)

2007 (Last modified: 4/19/2018)



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