

Seattle City Clerk Riplinger Deficit Audits, 1907-1910

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Seattle (Wash.). City Clerk
Title	Seattle City Clerk Riplinger Deficit Audits
Dates	1907-1910 (inclusive) 1907 1910
Quantity	1.2 cubic feet, (1 box, 2 volumes)
Collection Number	1802-E4
Summary	Audits and reports relating to the investigation of missing city funds in 1907. Former Comptroller John Riplinger was alleged to have embezzled the money.
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

Biographical Note

John Riplinger was born on October 12, 1864 in Minnesota, the son of French immigrant farmers. At the age of 18, he left the family farm to work in the office of a county auditor. He emigrated to Washington State in 1888 and settled in Skagit County. In 1890, Riplinger moved to Seattle where he hoped to go into the publishing business. In order to support himself and save some money, he went to work for the King County Auditor where he showed a remarkable aptitude for improving financial systems. He soon was appointed Chief Clerk.

Gold fever hit Riplinger in 1897 and in October he moved to northern British Columbia to try his hand at prospecting. However, he apparently met with little success as he returned to Seattle within two months and in January 1898 was appointed by Will Parry as chief clerk in the City Comptroller's Office. He continued in that job under Parry and the subsequent Comptroller, Frank Paul, until the spring of 1902 when he was elected Comptroller on the Republican Ticket.

Riplinger served two terms (four years) as Comptroller. He left office in March of 1906. In May 1907 an audit of City finances revealed that under Riplinger's supervision, City funds were short by \$68,178.91, and it was assumed that he embezzled the money. By the time this was discovered Riplinger had left the city, spent some time in California, and later was seen in Latin America.

The City Council detailed City Treasurer George Russell to investigate the shortfall and to locate Riplinger. Russell spent approximately a year tracking Riplinger, using Pinkerton detectives, and negotiating with the U.S. State Department to have Riplinger extradited from Honduras. Within a month of the extradition treaty being enacted, Riplinger “voluntarily” came back to Seattle, claiming the timing was coincidental.

The former Comptroller was charged in King County Superior Court with nine separate counts of larceny by embezzlement, the first case going to trial in December 1909. The prosecutor tried what he felt was the strongest charge first – a case where the state was able to prove both the delivery and the cashing of a check from the Independent Asphalt Company. (A City Council member witnessed Riplinger carrying the cash out of the bank.)

Riplinger’s defense was based on the claim that the check, while initially written to indemnify the city for the contractor’s work, was later offered as a personal loan, and the contractor, Herman Goetz, testified that this was the case. Neither Riplinger or Goetz could explain why, if this was so, they had not come forth with this information two years before when the accusations against Riplinger first were aired, and neither denied that Goetz and Riplinger were friends. As for the books Riplinger was seen removing from his desk upon leaving office, he claimed they were personal books and not the missing account books. Several witnesses testified to Riplinger’s good character.

The jury was instructed to consider this case only and not the other accusations against Riplinger. It took them only 30 minutes to find him not guilty. The prosecutor was taken aback, telling the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “I am unable to understand how any intelligent body of men could [find him innocent], and I am unable to reconcile myself to the verdict... I cannot help but think that the jury were swayed by sympathy.”

After the verdict, the prosecutor said he planned to try the other eight counts of larceny, and also threatened to prosecute Riplinger and Goetz for perjury. However, in October 1910, he filed a motion to dismiss the other charges, admitting “there would be little hope of securing a conviction.” After this announcement, Riplinger, who had been working as the manager of the Bismillah Bath House in Seattle, immediately resigned his position and made plans to return to his banana business in Honduras.

Content Description

The Riplinger Deficit Records include audits of various funds, deposits, checks by E.G. Shorrocks and Company; and reports on audits by Lester, Herrick and Herrick Company. Also included in the records is a detailed report by George Russell on his attempts to locate Riplinger after he fled the City. The report includes investigative notes by Pinkerton detectives, notes on Russell’s correspondence with the State Department, and an offer by “Lee Christmas” to hijack Riplinger and return him to Seattle.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[Item and date], Riplinger Deficit Audits , Record Series 1802-E4. Box [number], Folder [number].
Seattle Municipal Archives.

Administrative Information

Detailed Description of the Collection

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

1802-E4: Riplinger Deficit Audits, 1907-1910

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1/1	Report of George Russell on Search for Jonathan Riplinger	1908
1/2	Finance Committee Report on Audit Relative to the Riplinger Deficit	1908
1/3	Board of Public Works. Examination of Accounts	1907
1/4	Boiler Inspector's Department. Examination of Accounts	1907
1/5	Harbor Master's Office. Examination of Accounts	1907
1/6	Library. Examination of Accounts. Librarian's Cash	1907
1/7	Local Improvement District Funds. Checks Obtained from Contractors	1907
1/8	Local Improvement District Funds Dealt with by City Comptroller Personally	1907-1908
1/9	Local Improvement District Funds. Supplementary Statement re Deficiency	1907
1/10	Local Improvement District Funds. Fixed Estimates	1907
1/11	Municipal Court. Examination of Accounts	1907
1/12	Police Department. Examination of Accounts	1907
1/13	Street Department. Deposits on Street and Sewer Permits	1907

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/14	Water Department. Deposits Made with Water Department for Taps, etc.	1907
1/15	Water Department. Special Deposits Held by Auditor	1907
Volume		
1	Report on Audit (Lester, Herrick & Herrick)	1907
2	Report on Audit (Lester, Herrick & Herrick)	1907-1910

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Auditing--Washington (State)--Seattle

Embezzlement--Washington (State)--Seattle

Personal Names :

Riplinger, John

Geographical Names :

Seattle (Wash.)

Other Creators :

Corporate Names :

Seattle (Wash.). Comptroller's Office
(creator)

Finding aid prepared by Scott Cline and Julie Kerssen
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