

Seattle City Light Masonry Dam Construction Photograph Album, 1912-1915

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Seattle City Light
Title	Seattle City Light Masonry Dam Construction Photograph Album
Dates	1912-1915 (inclusive) 1912 1915
Quantity	.5 cubic ft., ((1 box))
Collection Number	1204-14
Summary	Photographs of Masonry Dam construction, including construction workers and equipment, dam site, clearcutting, trains and railroads, and bridges.
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
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note

Seattle City Light provides electricity and electrical and conservation services to its public and private customers. It is the largest public utility in the Pacific Northwest. Public responsibility for electrical energy dates to 1890 with creation of the Department of Lighting and Water Works. In 1902, Seattle voters passed a bond issue to develop hydroelectric power on the Cedar River under the administration of the Water Department. Electricity from this development began to serve Seattle in 1905. A City Charter amendment in 1910 created the Lighting Department. Under the leadership of Superintendent James D. Ross, the department developed the Skagit River hydroelectric project, which began supplying power in 1924. Both public and private power were supplied to Seattle until 1951 when the City purchased the private electrical power supply operations, making the Lighting Department the sole supplier. The Boundary Project in northeastern Washington began operations in 1967 and supplied over half of City Light's power generation. By the early 21st century, approximately ten percent of City Light's income came from the sale of surplus energy to customers in the Northwest and Southwest with the remainder of City Light's financial support coming from customer revenue. The current name of the agency was adopted in 1978 when the Department was reorganized.

Historical Background

In November 1910, an increased demand for power in Seattle resulted in the approval of a \$1,400,000 bond issue for construction of a dam on the Cedar River; construction on Masonry Dam began in 1912 and concluded in 1914. When completed, the crest of the dam stood 1600 feet above sea level. After construction was completed, the water collected in the basin behind the dam began seeping through the north bank of the reservoir. The bank could not be sealed because of a glacial moraine, and water continued to escape. This caused the level of water in Rattlesnake Lake to rise, resulting in the 1915 flooding of the town of Moncton.

Throughout construction, a twelve-foot opening had remained at the bottom of the dam, enabling water to pass through the opening during construction. In the fall of 1918, this opening was closed, and the water level in the Cedar Lake reservoir began to rise steadily. Water continued seeping out through the moraine into Rattlesnake Lake and Boxley Creek. On December 23, 1918, after heavy rains swelled the reservoir, a slide and washout in the moraine flooded the creek, destroying the small town of Edgewick and its sawmills, including that of the North Bend Lumber Company. No loss of life occurred.

In May of 1919, the North Bend Lumber Company brought a lawsuit against the City of Seattle for its "negligent action...in building the dam and raising the level of the impounded waters to such height that an overwhelming volume of flood water was caused to escape through the the northerly porous moraine barrier..." The matter went to trial, and the December 1919 verdict favored the City. However, a motion for a new trial was granted, and although it had prevailed in the initial case, the City negotiated a settlement and paid \$361,867.81 to the lumber company in 1928.

Content Description

The photograph album contains black-and-white photographs of the construction of Masonry Dam. Pictured are dam construction activities, construction workers and equipment, the dam site and camp covered in snow, clear cutting, trains and railroads, and bridges.

Many of the photographs are available in the [online photograph database](#). Selected photographs are available as high-resolution images.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[Title of image, date. Item number.] Seattle City Light Masonry Dam Construction Photograph Album, Record Series 1204-14. Page [number]. Seattle Municipal Archives.

Administrative Information

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Construction workers--Washington (State)

Dam construction--Washington (State)

Dams--Washington (State)

Water-power--Washington (State)

Corporate Names :

Seattle City Light

Geographical Names :

Cedar River (King County, Wash.)

Cedar River Watershed (King County, Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Photograph albums

Photographic prints

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