Overview of the Collection:
Level of Description: multi-level

Repository: University Archives & Special Collections, Foley Center Library, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA 99258 (509) 323-3847

Creator: James Edward O'Sullivan, 1876-1949

Title: James O'Sullivan Papers


Quantity: (in linear feet): 16 linear feet

Language: English

Summary: The materials consist of the papers of James O'Sullivan while he was working on the building of the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State. There are correspondence, clippings, documents, and photographs regarding the dam’s construction.

Use of Collection:
Access restrictions: This collection is open for research use.

Restriction on Use: Gonzaga University is the owner of the materials in Archives & Special Collections, Foley Center Library and makes available reproductions for research, publication, and other uses. Written permission must be obtained from Archives & Special Collections, Foley Center Library prior to any reproduction use. Gonzaga University does not necessarily hold copyright to all of the materials. In some cases, permission for use may require seeking additional authorization from the copyright owners.

Preferred citation: From the James O'Sullivan Papers located in Archives & Special Collections, Foley Center Library, Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington

Administrative Information:

Custodial history: The collection is mostly arranged as O'Sullivan had it organized. However, with two major researchers using the collection and with the later addition of other material, it was impossible to keep the collection arranged in the same order. The bulk of the material runs chronologically from 1919 to 1948. Also, O’Sullivan kept extensive clippings file on irrigation related matters separate from the other
materials. Some of the correspondence folders has been marked "Personal." However, it has been discovered that his personal correspondence was not included in this donation. Instead, it stayed with the widow and its location is not known.

Processing Note: Within the chronological files are materials pertaining to the various organizations that he was affiliated, such as the Columbia Basin Development League, the Columbia Basin Commission, and the Columbia Basin Project. Some has been filed separately under the organization's name, but the majority is housed chronologically in the Grand Coulee Dam Project files.

Provenance (acqinfo): The materials were collected by James O'Sullivan while working on the Grand Coulee Project. These materials were donated in 1958 by his widow and daughter, Kathleen.

**Subjects:**
Personal Names: O'Sullivan, James Edward, 1876-1949

LCSH Corporate Names: Columbia River Development League; Columbia Basin Commission (Wash.)

LCSH Topics: Dams – Washington (State);

Geographic Place names: Grand Coulee Dam (Wash.); Grand Coulee Dam (Wash.) -- Photographs

NWDA Browsing terms: Water and Water Rights; Irrigation; Public Works
SUMMARY:
James O'Sullivan is credited for his role in the building of the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State. He secured the creation of the Columbia Basin Commission and served as secretary of this Commission for several years. This collection contains mostly correspondence, clippings, photographs and documents about James O'Sullivan and the work to build the dam.

BIOGRAPHY
James O'Sullivan was born in Port Huron, Michigan June 26, 1876 to James Edward and Anna Waller O'Sullivan. Graduated from the University of Michigan with an A.B. degree in 1902. Studied law there and in 1903 was admitted to practice in the Michigan courts. Until 1905 helped his father in construction. Married Pearl Twiss and had three children: John T., Kathleen, and Arthur J. O'Sullivan. In 1905 was foreman of reinforced concrete construction on the American Savings Bank Building in Seattle, WA. Taught from 1906 to 1909 for State Normal School at Bellingham, WA. From 1910 to 1914 practiced law at Ephrata, WA and installed the first large pumping plant at Moses Lake, WA for the irrigation of 800 acres, developed an orchard and raised various crops. From 1915 to 1929 was president and general manager of the James O'Sullivan and Sons Company, Port Huron, MI, after father's death. Supervised the construction of many large works including electric substations, sewers, drains, canals, coffer-dams, high schools, churches, steam electrical installations, grain elevators, etc. In 1919 visited Ephrata and studied the proposal to build a dam at Grand Coulee high enough to divert water for irrigation without pumping. Interested the U.S. Reclamation Service in the proposal, which requested the State Columbia Basin Survey Commission, which was then studying a proposal to irrigate the Basin lands by the gravity system from Idaho, to include a study of the Grand Coulee proposal. Accompanied the State Survey Commission to the damsite. In 1920 spent three months overcoming the report of the Survey Commission that found the bedrock at the damsite was too deep and that it was improbable that a dam of sufficient height could be built at Grand Coulee. They considered a dam only 180 feet above water and were in favor of the gravity system. Wrote a review of the state report, studied bedrock conditions along the Columbia River, published articles to prove that water could be handled during construction at Grand Coulee and helped interest A. P. Davis, Director of the U.S. Reclamation Service and Hugh Cooper, famous builder of dams, in the Grand Coulee proposal. Accompanied Davis to dam site and secured from him a promise that he would recommend that the State of Washington appropriate funds to core drill the dam site. Davis also recommended that the state employ Willis T. Batchelor, a Seattle engineer, to study the Grand Coulee possibilities. In 1921 when core drilling disclosed excellent bedrock at a reasonable depth at Grand Coulee, reported in favor of a dam 220 feet above low water level and large scale pumping into the Grand Coulee for irrigation. In 1923 Major General George W. Goethals reported against the dam and in 1925 a Federal Columbia Basin Survey Board of Engineers also reported in favor of the gravity system.

In the fall of 1920 O'Sullivan returned to Port Huron to discover that he had lost a valuable contract while he was in Washington State. During his absence Nat Washington, William M. Clapp, Frank T. Bell and others tried to keep the Grand Coulee plan alive and in 1927 or 1928 Senator Wesley N. Jones was instrumental in having the Corps of Engineers, War Department, include the Columbia Basin in its survey of the Columbia River. In February 1929 returned to Ephrata about the time Major John S. Butler began his field survey of the upper Columbia River. O'Sullivan began writing and speaking for Grand Coulee Dam and in June 1929 the Columbia River Development League was formed at Ephrata with him as secretary. For the next 4 1/2 years with only $13,500 in finances, he carried on an active campaign for the dam with the help of others. This work included studies of the power market, of the feasibility of pumping, of the water tightness of the Grand Coulee, of the use of power to make projects feasible, etc. In 1931 Butler reported in favor of the dam as the economic means of irrigating Columbia Basin lands. In 1932 O'Sullivan spent the year in Washington D.C. trying to get the project authorized by Congress and in defending Major Butler's report at the hearings before the Rivers and Harbors Board and helped to secure hearings on the project in the House that when published became
known as the Bible of the project. In 1933 was active in Olympia, securing the creation of the Columbia Basin Commission and served as secretary of this Commission until April 1937. This Commission, with the help of others, secured the first funds for the construction of the dam. Was very active in having the foundation of the high dam built in place of the low dam and in clearing the Columbia River of all adverse rights that might prevent the building of the high dam. In 1937 and 1938 successfully undertook the formation of the first Columbia Basin Irrigation District, known as the Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District. Was secretary of this district for awhile. In 1938 helped to secure funds for completion of the dam. In 1940 and 1941 was consultant of the Bonneville Power Administration. In 1942 to 1943 secured the passage of the Columbia Basin Project, being representative of the Irrigation Districts at the national capital. In April 1943 became assistant of the newly created Columbia Basin Commission and in 1943-1944 spent six months in Washington D.C. securing the Columbia Basin Allocation and Repayment Report and the preparation of the Repayment Contract. From December 10, 1947 to July 1, 1948 represented the State Commission and the Columbia Basin Irrigation Districts at the national capital in securing appropriations for the Columbia Basin Project. In 1948 was recognized for his efforts with the renaming of the Potholes Dam to the O'Sullivan Dam. Died in February 1949. Altogether, spent 20 years full-time on the project. The Seattle Times stated that he led and won the fight for the Grand Coulee Dam.

Scope and Content Notes:
This collection contains mostly correspondence, printed materials, clippings, photographs and documents about James O'Sullivan and the work to build the dam.

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The materials were collected by James O'Sullivan while working on the Grand Coulee Project. These materials were donated to Gonzaga in 1958 by his widow and daughter, Kathleen.
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| #16/25 | Spokane, Washington: Spokane Savings and Loan Society | undated |
| #16/26 | Great Falls, Montana | 1930 |
| #16/27 | Los Angeles, California | 1930 |
| #16/28 | Michigan dredging | 1915-1919 |
| Port Huron, Michigan | | |
| Detroit-Edison Military Street substation | 1917 |
| First National Bank Building | 1903 |
| S.S. Kresge Building | 1923 |
| Saginaw, Michigan sewer contract | 1927 |
| St. Clair, Michigan | | |
| High School and St. Mary Catholic Church | 1922 |
| Grand Coulee Project | | |
| Senate delegates visit site | 1927 |
| Promoting the dam | 1930-1935 |
| Dam site prior to construction | undated |
| Meeting for the 1st bids for the Dam, Spokane | 1934 |
| President Roosevelt's visit to the dam site | 1934 |
| Directors of the Irrigation Districts | 1939 |
| Aerial views | 1929-1935 |
| Construction | 1934-35 |
| Construction | 1936-1938 |
| Machinery used for construction | 1934-1937 |
| Grand Coulee Dam | undated |
| Other Projects | | |
| Bonneville Dam | 1939 |
| Boulder Dam | 1934 |
| Kittitas Project, Washington | 1931 |
| Norris Dam, Tennessee | 1930 |
| Rock Island Development, Washington | 1931 |
| Rocky River Development Co., Connecticut | 1930 |
| Unknown locations | 1925-1937 |
| Negatives (negatives have been printed & filed) | undated |

**SERIES V: MAPS, BLUEPRINTS, AND CITATIONS**

Newspaper Citations Index

<p>| #16/53 | | 1918-1923 |
| #16/54 | | 1918-1933 |
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