

Holyoke Water Power Company Collection, 1857-2001

21 Document Cases, 2 Full Size Cartons, 3 Oversized Bound Ledgers, 49 Bound Volumes
(12.5 linear feet)

Collection Number: HPLA2005.110

Abstract:

The Holyoke Water Power Company successfully operated and maintained the dam, canal system, and hydroelectric facilities along the Connecticut River in Holyoke, Massachusetts for 108 years beginning in 1859. The HWP Collection consists of hydrological reports and studies; financial, property, and court records; publications and personal papers; and publicity materials including photographs and special edition newspapers.

Historical Note:

January 31, 1859 marked the incorporation of the Holyoke Water Power Company (HWP) by the Massachusetts legislature. The Hadley Falls Company, which a few years before fell into financial crisis, was deemed unfit to manage the canal system it purchased from the Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on the Connecticut River in 1847. The Commonwealth first chartered the Proprietors to construct the South Hadley navigation canal in 1792. In March of 1859 Alfred Smith purchased the Hadley Falls Company for \$325,000 and reorganized the business to become the first president and founder of the Holyoke Water Power Company. The new HWP estate included the wooden dam across the Connecticut River, over 1,100 acres of land, roughly two and half miles of power canals on three levels with a lock between the first and second level, and the water supply and distribution system. In 1868 the company built the office at 1 Canal Street.

Businesses and factories flocked to Holyoke during the late 19th century to take advantage of the water power supplied to the newly planned city. The American Writing Paper Company, William Skinner & Sons, Whiting Paper Company, Germania Mills, the Holyoke Street Railway, and the Farr Alpaca Company all purchased energy from HWP to run their operations. To handle the increased demand, HWP proposed a stone dam in 1895 to replace the timber structure. While the dam construction proceeded, HWP agreed in principle to sell the gas and electric works to the City of Holyoke. The city did not accept the initial proposal, however, and in April of 1899 litigation commenced. The legal process ensued until February of 1900 when HWP and the city agreed to a ten-year lighting contract. In December of 1902 HWP transferred the property of the gas and electric works to the city of Holyoke, and soon after they reached an agreement and special legislation from the state which permitted HWP to sell electric power to local industries.

By January of 1900, a month prior to the settlement of the city contract, the newly completed stone dam construction was an engineering marvel of its day; it was anchored in rock and built thirty feet high from precision cut granite blocks by men, horses, and pulley systems. Edward S. Waters, Chief Engineer and Treasurer, oversaw the stone dam

project. HWP also erected two hydroelectric power stations. The primary Number One station was built in 1906. The Number Two station, built in 1921 a mile away, permitted by-product electricity generation during the balancing of the canals as water passed from first to the second level. HWP supplied 45,000 horsepower to the city, and from 1905 to 1928 the total electric output increased from 2.5 million kilowatt hours to over 52.5 million kilowatt hours. HWP sold about 30 percent of its electricity output to western Massachusetts companies outside of Holyoke.

In 1920 Robert E. Barrett, Sr. became the Treasurer of HWP, and three years later he assumed the presidency. In 1925 HWP incorporated the Holyoke Power and Electric Company as public utility. This entity had charted rights to generate, transmit, and sell electricity throughout Massachusetts and beyond. It supplied wholesale energy to Chicopee and South Hadley. During the late 1920s, the Turner Falls Company attempted to acquire HWP, and the media even falsely reported the sale of the company in November of 1928. HWP was a lucrative enterprise during this time, and, from 1920 to 1930, its gross income from electricity increased by more than 600 percent. In 1928, due to a violation of power restrictions, the Whiting Paper Company received a lawsuit from the HWP claiming it had not abided by their 16-hour mill power agreement. Whiting Company soon after filed a countersuit. In May of 1931 the Massachusetts Supreme Court heard the case, and in September it ruled in favor of HWP.

In another court case in 1932, the HWP challenged one of its own by-laws which stipulated that clients pay their annual rent for water power in silver bullion. Although HWP had accepted rent payments in paper currency for decades, the American Writing Paper Company paid in silver, following the original rules drafted by the Hadley Falls Company and which HWP never officially amended. A district court judge ruled in favor of the American Writing Paper Company, and an appeal by HWP upheld the decision in a U.S. circuit court in 1933. In this same year began disputes of rent paid in gold as well. A Joint Resolution of Congress in 1933 banned debt payments of gold, and the HWP gold case reached the Supreme Court in 1937 to no avail. Although HWP lost both the gold and silver rulings, the company greatly benefited from payments in silver after 1965, when the price of the precious metal recovered from years of recession.

In March of 1936 a 1,000 foot-long ice jam broke over the Holyoke dam and destroyed the top layer of granite blocks. A record high, near 17 foot overflow raced over the dam once the ice broke. Electric motors and hydroelectric generators at Riverside Station were completely submerged underwater. In response, HWP not only repaired the top of the dam, but also bricked all the Riverside Station windows lower than 20 feet and reinforced the gatehouse which controlled the water entering into the canal system. The late 1930s also saw an expansion in electric supply services, which included a 15-year contract with the city of Chicopee. During this decade HWP expansion and construction projects included 13,800 volt cable lines and two substations to power Chicopee, a 150,000 pound per hour steam boiler, a 10,000 kW steam turbine, and a 4,000 kW hydroelectric generator at Riverside Station.

In 1938 HWP experienced its first labor negotiations when 18 of the 30 employees joined the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). In April of that year the company and the local B-926 of the IBEW agreed upon a contract and peaceful negotiations lasted for nearly 50 years. The military drafted many HWP employees, and

others volunteered during World War II. A day after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, all HWP property closed except for the entrance of military personnel and representatives from the Federal Power Commission. Armed guards patrolled the gatehouse through the first years of the war, and all employees were fingerprinted. In the 1940s, however, HWP experience growth despite staff limitations and fuel oil rationing. In 1942, to curtail the lack of resources, HWP purchased power from the Turners Falls Power and Electric Company. By 1945, electric sales reached over \$1.2 million. The growth and peak success of HWP up to this point is due to the management of Robert E. Barrett, Sr. He passed away in October of 1945 and his son, Robert E. Barrett, Jr., who joined the company fresh out of college in 1930, assumed his father's responsibilities.

In 1949 the Federal Power Commission granted a 50-year license for the dam, canal system, and hydroelectric properties. It also required the construction of fish passage facilities which would allow salmon, shad, and herring to migrate upstream. The development of an entirely new fishway elevator system earned the HWP the Conservation Service Award in 1956. The Robert E. Barrett Fishway is now an engineering marvel as well as an environmental tourism attraction and the site of the Shad Derby fishing competition.

In 1952, the company built a 15,400 kW hydroelectric generator at the dam, and in 1962 it constructed Mt. Tom Station, a 136,000 kW fossil fuel electric generating power plant. By 1967, just before the merger with Northeast Utilities, HWP revenues reached over \$12 million. On September 30, 1967 the affiliation with Northeast Utilities was made official, marking the end of 108 years of service to the city of Holyoke.

Scope and Contents:

The first series of the Holyoke Water Power Company Collection comprises 8 boxes of corporate, historical, and environmental reports. The second series includes select invoices from the HWP President, Robert E. Barrett, Jr., which are bound in oversized ledgers. Other invoices in this series are not bound, and are stored in Box 21 [Note: Box 21 is not listed in numerical order within the Series Descriptions]. The third series in this collection combines scrapbooks, newspapers, and publications. It contains company and industry histories written by Robert E. Barrett, Jr., Payson Jones, and Elisabeth Shoemaker. Also included in this series are the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram special editions commemorating HWP anniversaries, as well as various newspaper clippings about the company's progress. This series contains some unique 19th century industry publications related to commerce, mechanics, and electricity.

Series 4 is personal papers and correspondence, while Series 5 is photographs of HWP factories and properties [Note: Box 12 is not listed in numerical order within the Series Descriptions]. The sixth series includes HWP court records. This series contains hearing briefs and transcripts recorded in documents and bound volumes. Property records are organized in Series 7, which include deeds, mortgages, and lease proposals.

The eighth series in this collection contains reports, records, and newsletters from affiliate electric companies, including the Chicopee and South Hadley Electric Light

Departments and the Western Massachusetts Electric Company. The records concerning the return of certain affiliates to public utilities are also within this series. The final series in the collection, Series 9, comprises hydrological studies used, researched, and/or conducted by the Holyoke Water Power Company from the 1870s through the 1930s.

Information on Use

Terms of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

The collection is open for research

Preferred Citation

Cite As: Holyoke Water Power Company Collection (HPLA2005.106)
Holyoke Public Library History Room & Archive.

Custodial History

Collection donated by Robert E. Barrett, Jr. and the Holyoke Gas & Electric Department

Processing Information

Collection processed by Jim Massery

Related Materials:

See the Holyoke Gas & Electric Department Collection

Additional Information:

Repository Information

Holyoke Public Library
History Room & Archives
250 Chestnut Street
Holyoke, MA 01040

Telephone: (413) 420-8107
www.holyokelibrary.org

Series Descriptions:

**Series 1: Corporate Reports, Brochures, and Historical or
Environmental Assessments** (7 Boxes, 1 Full Size Carton)

1870-1998

- Box 1: Environmental Impact Report Westfield Barnes Airport, 2001
Noise and Vibration Assessment Westover AFB, 1994
Environmental Impact Statement on the Construction of I-391, 1974
- Box 2: [See Item Descriptions on Box Label]
- Box 3: HWP Brochures and Booklets on History and Development, 1925-1965
- Box 4: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Dam Licensure (FERC), 1998
- Box 5: FERC, 1998; HWP Administrative Records 1972-1998
- Box 6: Reports of the Water Power Company of the United States, 1880s [Fragile]
- Box 7: Holyoke Energy Recovery Company (HERC), 1985-1986
- Box 8: Connecticut River Storage, 1914
Proposal for Stone Dam, 1895
Brochure for the Erie Ball Corliss Engine, circa 1930
Boston Manufacturers Mutual Fire Insurance Company, 1882-1888

Series 2: HWP Invoices (1 Box, 3 Bound Ledgers) 1947-1972

- Ledger 1: 1947-1949
- Ledger 2: 1958-1964
- Ledger 3: 1965-1972
- Box 21: Sundry Billing System, 1971-1990

Series 3: Scrapbooks, Newspapers, and Publications (5 Boxes) 1865-1999

- Box 9: Holyoke Transcript-Telegram Special Editions, 1926-1960 (Fragile)
HWP Winner of Audubon Award, 1965
History of HWP by Payson Jones, 1929
Blue Print of Stone Dam Cross-Section, 1894
Histories of the Holyoke Water Power Company, circa 1930
- Box 10: "The Building of a City: The History of a Company,"
by Robert E. Barrett, Jr., 1965
"River Gods: Their Story in Pioneer Valley," by Elisabeth
Shoemaker, 1941
Scrapbooks on Industrial Development, 1953-1959
Newspaper Clippings, 1953-1959
- Box 11: Holyoke Transcript-Telegram Special Editions, 1948 and 1960
Year of the Dam 1999 Calendar
100th and 111th Anniversary of HWP
Photocopies of Dam Photographs, 1870-1930
Mechanics' Magazine, 1865
Boston Journal of Commerce, 1888
Boston Commercial Bulletin, 1889
The Electric World, 1887-1888
Engineering News, circa 1880
- Box 12: Scrapbook of Industrial Development, 1960-1964
Holyoke Transcript-Telegram Newspaper Clippings, 1894-1896
- Box 13: Statistical Bulletin of the Electric Utility Industry of New England, 1952-1968

Series 4: Personal Papers and Correspondence (2 Boxes) 1896-1990

Box 12: HWP and William Whiting, 1896
John Hickey and the Holyoke Historical Commission, 1970-1990
Box 21: HWP and South Hadley, 1975-1986

Series 5: Photographs (1 Box) 1950-1960

Box 12: HWP Operating Properties, 1950-1960

Series 6: Court Records (1 Box, 49 Bound Volumes) 1882-1928

Box 14: Hearing Transcripts, HWP vs. City of Holyoke, 1901
Supreme Court Briefs, HWP vs. Whiting Company, 1928
Volumes (49): HWP Petitioner vs. City of Holyoke, 1899-1901 (43)
HWP vs. Connecticut River Company, 1882 (5)
Supplement to the General Statutes of Massachusetts (1)

Series 7: Property Records (1 Box) 1857-1958

Box 15: HWP Lease Proposals
Acts, Decrees, and Deeds and Abstract of Deeds, 1882
Property Leased by HWP, 1857-1870
Gas Works Property, 1879-1881
Mortgage and Deed of Trust, 1958
Bound Volume (1): HWP Tenement Leases, 1882-1885

Series 8: Affiliate Electric Companies (4 Boxes) 1913-1991

Box 16: Annual Reports of the Chicopee and South Hadley Electric Light
Departments, 1934-1991
Box 17: Annual Reports of the Chicopee Municipal Lighting
Department, 1964-1973
Box 18: Annual Reports of the South Hadley Municipal Lighting
Department, 1913-1957; Reports on the Return of Chicopee
and South Hadley Lighting Departments to Public Utilities, 1986
Box 19: Annual Reports of the South Hadley Electric Light
Department, 1989-1991
Box 20: Annual Reports of the South Hadley Electric Light
Department, 1989-1991; Newsletters of Western Massachusetts Electric
Company, 1972-1978

Series 9: Hydrology Studies (1 Carton, 1 Box) 1870-1930

Box 22: Hydrological Studies, 1870-1930 (Full Size Carton)
Box 23: Hydrological Studies, 1870-1930 (Document Case)