

Title of Exhibit:

“Merely as a Hobby”

Robert Hitchman: a Lifetime of Pacific Northwest History

Description of exhibit to be used as an explanatory poster in the exhibit case:

Robert Hitchman was an important figure not only because of the historical materials he collected, but because of the position he created for himself in the local historical and bibliographic communities. He contributed to and participated wholeheartedly in the rising local history movement in the Pacific Northwest – a movement which was national in scope during the 1960s and 1970s, and which has profoundly shaped our current understanding of history. Despite his full-time career in insurance, and his avowedly amateur status as a historian, he managed to make significant contributions to the study of historical place names in Washington State. Besides making these specific contributions himself, and developing an extensive collection of books, papers and ephemera, he was instrumental in helping and encouraging the work of many others – serving as a mentor, patron, researcher, editor, and go-between for numerous students, authors, academics, and other ‘amateurs’ similar to himself, as well as fostering interest in Pacific Northwest history in the public at large. His collection reflects this wide range of connections within the history of the region, and even more so within the story of the study of and interest in that history. Hitchman was a central figure in this story – though he was far too humble to have ever identified himself as such.

This selection of items from Hitchman’s collection highlights some of his many interests and activities, and is only a small sample of a much larger collection - which is now available to researchers in Special Collections.

Groupings of items for exhibit and caption text:

1. Pacific Northwest Place Names:

The intersection of geography, history, and linguistics

These items are a sample of Hitchman’s working materials for his major publication. “Place Names of Washington,” which was published posthumously by the Washington State Historical Society, in 1985. The large bound book is a part of the original source material for UW Professor Edmund Meany’s earlier book, "Origin of Washington Geographic Names." This book served as Hitchman’s inspiration for his own project, when he studied under Meany at the UW in the 1920s. Hitchman made notes of geographic names used in many of the books he read, keeping track of them through notecards (or whatever scraps of paper he had readily available) that he then kept in the front of each book for later reference.

1. Edmund Meany Place Names Source Material, 1915-1923

2. Hitchman Place Names Notecards
3. Hitchman Historical Site Markers Notebook
4. March 29, 1939 letter from George C. Martin to Lewis A. McArthur; October 6, 1942 letter from Hitchman to Lewis A. McArthur

2. The Whitmans

Early missionaries in Oregon Territory, 1836-1847

Some of the materials Hitchman collected related to Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. Their attempts to establish a mission, and their eventual death in an incident known as the 'Whitman Massacre,' made them a focus of study for many later historians of the Pacific Northwest. These materials include an original letter written to Mrs. Whitman, an original periodical reporting the departure of the Whitmans for Oregon, as well as later materials which reveal later interpretations of the incident.

5. November, 1847 letter to Mrs. Whitman from Mrs. Walker, relates her feelings on learning of the death of her brother and grandmother, and also states that "all may not be quiet between Indians [and] whites."
6. The Missionary Herald, April 1836, Vol. XXXII, no.4: This includes a "Brief notice" on page 162 of the Whitmans' departure "for their fields of labor"
7. Various pamphlets related to different viewpoints in the history of the 'Whitman Massacre'
8. 1960s park service map of the Whitman Mission historic site
9. May 10, 1972, letter from Celesta C. Platz to Hitchman; November 2, 1962, letter from W. L. D. to Hitchman

3. Isaac I. Stevens

First governor of Washington Territory, 1853-1857

Some of Hitchman's collection relating to Isaac I. Stevens, who was governor during the brief conflict known as the 'Indian War' of 1855-1856. The original Quartermaster's chit details some of the minor expenses associated with this event, and the scrapbooks present a collection of historic newspaper clippings.

10. Quartermaster's chit for expenses incurred during the 'Indian War' of 1855-56, signed by Stevens
11. A scrapbook of 19th century newspaper clippings relating to the 'Indian War' of 1855-1856
12. A scrapbook containing a 1902 newspaper printing of a prizewinning essay on Stevens

13. Uncut government pamphlet issued while Stevens was governor.

4. The Seattle Fire

June 6th, 1889

These materials relate to the Seattle Fire of 1889, and range from original photographs taken immediately after the fire, to much later ephemera that reference the event. The broad range of Hitchman's sources provide evidence of a very open approach to historical research.

14. Photographs of Seattle, taken by Smith & Bart, just after the fire

15. 1964 Seattle Times Rotogravure cover page

16. 1939 Washington Mutual Brochure

17. September 30, 1975, letter from Hitchman to Dorothy Inhelder

18. Copies of a letter from Mary A. Vestal to her daughter Mrs. William Muth, written from Seattle the day after the fire. This letter describes the aftermath of the fire.

5. Lewis & Clark

Early explorers: the Corp of Discovery, 1803-1806

Hitchman was very interested in all of the early explorers of the Pacific Northwest. This collection of ephemera all relate to the Lewis & Clark expedition. Hitchman also collected material on other well known explorers such as James Cook, George Vancouver, and Charles Wilkes; as well as local explorers such as James Christie. As his collection of contemporary advertising will attest, he was also interested in the use made of this history in his own time.

19. 1967 Eastern Airlines trade bead ad

20. March 16, 1976, letter from Donald S. Voorhees to Hitchman

21. Lewis and Clark Sesquicentennial 3 cent stamps

22. Traveller's Rest Buffet Lounge Car brochure

23. June 7, 1967, letter from Hitchman to Arthur D. Lewis, Senior Vice President, Eastern Airlines

24. Pathfinders of the Great Northwest pamphlet

6. SS Beaver

Maritime history

Besides collecting books, papers, and ephemera, Hitchman also collected some artifacts. This coin and medallion, as well as the paper materials, relate to the Beaver - the first steamship to ply the waters of the Pacific Northwest.

25. 1892 Souvenir medallion, made from the boiler of the wrecked Beaver and gold-plated; and 1966 Centennial coin commemorating the first steamship on the Pacific coast
 26. Reprinted photos of the Beaver
 27. Notebook on Pacific Northwest shipwrecks compiled by Capt. N.A. McDougall
 28. Scrapbook assembled by Hitchman about the Beaver, circa 1950s
 29. British Columbia Centennial Beaver Replica brochure
7. "Sighted from the Crow's Nest"

Hitchman's bibliographic interests

A selection of Hitchman's book collection, and some copies of the bibliographic newsletter on local history that he published between 1952 and 1979: "Sighted from the Crow's Nest." These letters reveal some of the many ways that he fit into the bibliophilic community.

30. Selection of books from Hitchman's collection
 31. Hitchman's copies of his bibliographic newsletter, "Sighted from the Crow's Nest"
 32. January 21, 1965, letter from Helen Pierce to Hitchman; November 5, 1967 letter from Hitchman to Mr. Wade
 33. September 3, 1957, letter from Hitchman to Dr. Burt Brown Barker
 34. Hitchman correspondence: October 5, 1954, letter from J. W. Todd, Jr., Manager of the Shorey Bookstore, to Hitchman
8. Hewitt Jackson

Local artist and maritime historian

Hewitt Jackson designed Hitchman's bookplate, a rough sketch of which is presented here, as well as his Christmas cards. Hitchman was a patron of Jackson throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and helped him to mount exhibitions and bring his work to a larger audience. Hitchman even kept many of the checks he wrote to Jackson over the years.

35. October 22, 1974, letter from Hitchman to Bailey Bishop, Goodspeed's Bookshop; May 15, 1973 letter from Hitchman to Hewitt Jackson
36. Oregon Historical Society Newsletters - May 1970 & June 1979

37. Original sketches by Hewitt Jackson, including a rough draft of Hitchman's bookplate
38. May 13, 1978, photo of Hitchman and Jackson taken at the Washington State Historical Society
39. 1956-1964 Checks written to Jackson from Hitchman

9. Curious Interests

Why stop there?

While Hitchman's predominant focus was the history and especially the place names of the Pacific Northwest, he was also interested in or curious about a wide range of other topics. These items give a taste of the more eclectic side of his collection.

40. Undated manuscript book by T. Wiedemann, a poet and cartoonist in Seattle in the early twentieth century
41. Mid-19th century scrapbook assembled by William Simpson, and entitled "The Praying Machine," containing discourses on Buddhist prayer wheels and other aspects of Indian religion
42. A 1971 letter from Peter Byrne, soliciting information on the Sasquatch, which Hitchman allowed to be circulated to the people on the mailing list for his newsletter
43. Sasquatch clippings and ephemera
44. 1944 D-Day transport ships loading diagrams, saved by Hitchman from his time in the service during WWII