Guide to the Law Department records

Finding aid prepared by Kristen Swett
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Historical note

The Office of Attorney and Solicitor was established by ordinance passed on June 18, 1827. The Office of City Attorney was abolished by ordinance passed April 29, 1846. The ordinance passed March 30, 1881 established the Office of Corporation Counsel and Office of City Solicitor. Known as the Law Department, it was jointly under the charge of the Corporation Counsel and City Solicitor. The Office of City Solicitor was abolished and the department placed under sole charge of the Corporation Counsel by the ordinance which went into effect on July 1, 1904.

The Corporation Counsel has supervisory authority over all City attorneys and legal affairs. The Law Department has general charge of all the City’s legal affairs, and represents the City of Boston and the County of Suffolk in all litigation to which they are a party. The Department provides a comprehensive array of legal services: formal and informal opinions to the Mayor, the City Council, the Boston School Committee, and City or County Officials and other employees in matters relating to the discharge of their official duties; and representation for these individuals and entities in litigation of all types. Additionally, the Law Department reviews all City and County contracts, pursues claims on behalf of the City through affirmative litigation, initiates foreclosure proceedings on tax delinquent properties, and conducts a program which provides technical assistance to citizens and others with problems concerning immigration, residency status and naturalization.

Scope and Contents note

This collection includes files kept by the City's Law Department on various issues, cases, questions that came before the department during the 20th century. Significant issues, etc. represented in this collection include the Cocoanut Grove Fire, West End Redevelopment, World War, City Real estate holdings, gifts to the city, bridge construction, City Hospital, City Hall construction and many others. The first series includes a numbered reference file that was kept by the Law Department from the early 1900s-1960s. A card index for these files is included and there are gaps in the numbering of the files. The topics include various cases and issues that came before the Law Department. Other series include files on bequests, bridges, contracts, litigation, real estate and railroads. Files kept by William H. Kerr, the senior legal researcher in the Law Department from the 1930s-1970 are also included. He is perhaps responsible for the maintenance of these files in the Law Department. The bulk of the material in this collection dates from 1908-1970. Related series include Law Department correspondence, Legal Opinions and litigation files on major cases.

Series I: Numbered files, 1908-1970 (19.0 Cubic feet)

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