



# Seattle Area Archivists Newsletter

**Winter 2004**

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(note our new address!!)

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## **Steering Committee**

Helice Koffler, Chair (206-296-1538)

Valoise Armstrong, Vice Chair

Jodee Fenton, Secretary

Carolyn McClurkan, Treasurer

Peter Schmid, Member-at-Large

Need to contact Seattle Area Archivists? Note our new address!

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Visit us on the Web at <http://www.historylink.org/saa>

## **From the Chair**

*Helice Koffler*

Many of you probably attended a party last October for the launch of KC Snapshots, a new Web site containing an online database of historic King County photographs

(<http://content.lib.washington.edu/imls/kcsnapshots/index.html>). This database was the culmination of an innovative two-year project, *Crossing Organizational Boundaries*, which got large and small heritage organizations in the area to collaborate in providing greater public access to their collections. Seattle Area Archivist members who attended the February 2003 meeting had the opportunity to hear firsthand about this project in a presentation given by *Crossing Organizational Boundaries* participants and organizers.

I was gratified to see so many of you in attendance at our first meeting of the 2003-2004 year, which took place at the Pacific Northwest Ballet Archives. It seemed very fitting somehow that we were able to meet at PNB on the eve of the centenary of the birth of the great choreographer, George Balanchine. At a time when ballet companies throughout the world were preparing their own tributes to, and celebrations of, Balanchine, a renewed commitment to both preservation *and* moving forward seemed to be very much in the air. Francia Russell, co-artistic director of PNB, who graciously stopped by to greet our group before the program, has been in the forefront of preserving the legacy of Balanchine. Similarly, PNB has shown great foresight in preserving its own heritage by being one of the first, and still one of the few, professional ballet companies to establish an archives program. We were fortunate indeed to hear Seattle Area Archivists member Birgit Hansen's informative and touching presentation on the special challenges she has faced in setting up and maintaining an archives for this important company.

The local arts community, which has been particularly hard hit by the bad economy, is certainly at great risk of losing its own valuable heritage. Arts funding, in general, is very vulnerable right now and awareness of, and funding for, archives programs, as we are all aware, is often a low priority within organizations, if it is even on the radar at all. A collaborative approach sounds like a good strategy for documenting the history of the arts community and other communities at risk in the Seattle area. While the *Crossing Organizational Boundaries* model may or may not prove to be the most relevant one for future projects, it is a local success story to which we can all look. I hope that the Seattle Area Archivists, through its membership meetings and other initiatives, can be a place where a dialogue about addressing those problems facing our area's threatened heritage resources can truly begin.

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## February Meeting

Please join us for a tour of Corbis, Inc. at our February meeting! Founded by Microsoft chairman Bill Gates in 1989, Corbis is a preeminent provider of digital stock photography and art images (<http://pro.corbis.com>). We will not be able to have a business meeting at this site, so the meeting will consist only of the tour given by Corbis staff. Depending on the number in attendance, we may need to break into two groups.

Where: Corbis, Inc. at 710 2nd Ave, Ste. 200 (corner 2<sup>nd</sup> and Cherry) in Seattle

When: Thursday, February 26, 2:30-4:00

## Fall Meeting Report

### *Peter Schmid, Member-at-Large*

The Fall meeting was held at the Pacific Northwest Ballet at Seattle Center on November 13, and was attended by about 25 archivists. The Steering Committee reported the following business:

- The transition meeting was held in June to settle new committee appointments
- Purchase of a new display board for use at meetings and conferences, such as the Archives Week event at City Hall
- Processing of SAA records completed by past chair Janette Gomes
- Treasurer reported a balance of \$735.97

The group was welcomed by Francia Russell, Co-Artistic Director of PNB. Our speaker was the archivist, Birigit Hansen. Birigit grew up as a dancer in her native Copenhagen, and studied Scandinavian literature and culture there. Her experience as a student studying original manuscripts of the Norse Sagas inspired her to work with archives, along with a passion for preserving tradition and "the need to catalog."

Birigit served as Vice-President of the Bellevue Historical Society (now Eastside Heritage Center), and became involved with Pacific Northwest Ballet through her children's ballet classes. She has been there for seven years.

When she first arrived, Birigit was faced with a mish-mash of largely unorganized material: "Rusty bikes, Styrofoam cups and original George Balanchine letters were all mixed together." While she is mostly a "lone arranger," Birigit does have the help of occasional volunteers. The records pre-date the establishment of the company in 1967, and include private collections donated by Board members and others. Departments now turn records over to the archives regularly. She believes that the relatively small archive serves a larger purpose as a part of the history of the arts in the Northwest.

Birigit described the pros and cons of being an in-house archive that is a small part of a large arts organization whose primary purpose is performance. But, she observed, "What has been art becomes history." This fact makes the large videotape collection particularly valuable. "When the curtain goes down, the performance doesn't exist anymore, except on these tapes." The archive rents equipment for the transfer of film and legacy video formats to DVCam, a low-compression digital tape. Birigit noted that the dancers themselves are one of the primary beneficiaries of the video record, and enjoy seeing past performances and sometimes helping to identify items in scrapbooks. (She showed our group portions of the in-progress video on the history of PNB's famous "Nutcracker" production, which includes Maurice Sendak working on the original set and costumes). Thanks to the preservation of student records, the ballet was able to invite all of the girls who played Clara (over 100!) for the anniversary celebration.

The group toured the small archives room (there is additional storage in a Fremont facility) and got a quick glimpse of the costume shop which was in the midst of "Nutcracker" preparations.

Birigit's passion for both dance and archives is apparent as she moves between the dance spaces and storage areas. "I've always worked where art and history cross."

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## **Seattle Heritage Coalition Meets 7 p.m. Feb 23 at MOHAI**

Interested parties associated with heritage organizations and activities in Seattle and vicinity have been invited to participate in the newly inaugural meeting of the Seattle Heritage Coalition, to develop sustained support for heritage organizations, enhance public policy as it relates to heritage, and promote cooperation among heritage groups on Monday February 23 at 7 p.m. at the Museum of History & Industry, 2700 24th Ave. E, Seattle. The Coalition was established by the Association of King County Historical Organizations (AKCHO) in September, and is intended to work with more than 80 heritage and preservation organizations that are headquartered in Seattle and vicinity. Joan Mraz, President of the Southwest Seattle Historical Society, is interim chair of the new group. For information contact Mraz at [mrzajps.net](mailto:mrzajps.net) or (206) 246-9009.

## **Archives Week 2004: Ideas Sought!**

### ***Helice Koffler, Chair***

In the "it's never too early" category: A committee met on February 3, 2004 at the Puget Sound Regional Branch of the Washington State Archives to begin discussing plans for Archives Week events and activities in Seattle for 2004. Attending this meeting were Jerry Handfield, Mike Saunders, Janette Gomes, and Terry Badger of the Washington State Archives; Candace Lein-Hayes, NARA Pacific Alaska Region; Scott Cline, Seattle Municipal Archives; Charles Payton, Cultural Development Authority; and myself, representing Seattle Area Archivists. Seattle Area Archivists, by joining forces with the Washington State Archives and NARA, hopes to play a more active role in making this year's celebration an even greater success. It was settled that Archives Week in Washington State would take place from October 2-9, 2004. Opportunities for Seattle Area Archivists members to contribute will be plentiful in the coming months as plans more firmly take shape. Please watch for further updates in this newsletter or for announcements from Seattle Area Archivists by e-mail. In the meantime, the committee is soliciting your ideas for this year's theme. Please send your suggestions to [seattle\\_area\\_archivists@yahoo.com](mailto:seattle_area_archivists@yahoo.com) by **March 15, 2004**. Additionally, please feel free to share any other ideas, questions, or concerns you may have regarding Archives Week 2004 with me directly at [helice.koffler@metrokc.gov](mailto:helice.koffler@metrokc.gov).

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