

From the Chair



My Chicago

Sarah Erikson

I'm so excited that the Annual Conference this year is in my hometown. As a passionate steward of government information in Chicago, here are a few highlights of my city and my collection.

The last time the American Library Association conference was in Chicago was the Midwinter Meetings held in February 2015, when attendees got a taste of Chicago's winter. Between Saturday night and Monday morning, more than nineteen inches of snow fell as librarians settled into hotel rooms and bars from Streeterville to McCormick Place.¹ In winters past, such storms have at times been politically significant. After the Blizzard of 1979, Jane Byrne won the mayoral election in an unprecedented upset. Chicagoans had re-elected the incumbent mayor in the five previous elections (Richard J. Daley served from 1955 to 1976). Michael Bilandic's term as mayor could have been the start to another dynasty, if not for the snow. You could take Whet Moser's word for it, in "Snowpocalypse Then: How the Blizzard of 1979 Cost the Election for Michael Bilandic."² Or you could use the government information expertise and collections of the Chicago Public Library.

If you are interested in mayoral history, there are biographies and inaugural addresses from the first mayor to the current one on the "Chicago Mayors" page of the Chicago Public Library website.³ Perhaps you want to see local newspaper articles; if so, the Municipal Reference Collection's clipping file is still the best way to find articles organized by subject. Doubt the election results? Try viewing the Chicago Board of Elections returns from 1886 to 1981 on aperture cards, which are a type of microform especially suited for folio-sized hand-written ledgers that had the vote totals. Chicago's weather records? The National Weather Service has a webpage devoted to Chicago's Official Extreme Weather Records.⁴

At the most recent Midwinter Meeting in Atlanta in January 2017, some attendees marched with the Atlanta March for Social Justice and Women.⁵ The city was prepared for the protest. The beautiful lawns and gardens of Centennial Olympic Park were fenced off, and marchers were kept on streets that were closed to traffic. Police officers and protesters were giving high fives to each other. I can't help but reflect on the contrast between this protest and protests held in Chicago during the summer of 1968.

If you're unfamiliar with what happened when Chicago hosted the Democratic National Convention in August 1968,

it was pretty much the opposite of what happened in Atlanta. But you don't have to take my word for it, you can read the Walker Report (does anyone still reference government reports by their popular names?), also known as "Rights in Conflict: The Violent Confrontation of Demonstrators and Police in the Parks and Streets of Chicago during the Week of the Democratic National Convention of 1968" or "Dissent in a Free Society: A Report to the Citizens of Chicago on the City's Handling of Public Dissent in the Streets and Parks," both of which are in the ready reference section of the Government Publications Department at the Harold Washington Library Center.⁶

Like Atlanta, Chicago also has a large central park: Grant Park, which is between the Loop and Lake Michigan. Unlike Atlanta, Grant Park is built on lakefill: Chicago's original shoreline was Michigan Avenue. Its unnatural history is documented by the Municipal Reference Guy's in his History of Grant Park blog series on the Chicago Public Library website. Grant Park has been contentious land even from the earliest days.⁷

The 1968 clash between protesters and police wasn't the first battle on Chicago's lakefront. The 1812 Battle of Fort Dearborn, represented as one of the stars on the city flag, can claim that title. Though many history books refer to it as a "massacre," recent publications consider it a battle in the War of 1812; the Potawatomi fighting for the British forces against what was at the time a very remote United States Army outpost.⁸

While the Chicago Public Library may not have any official publications from the city about that battle (Chicago wasn't incorporated until 1837), in the Government Publications Department you can find the *Territorial Papers of the United States* (GS 4.13), wherein several accounts of the "foreign" wars are published.⁹

So if you get a chance to visit Chicago, check out the landmarks of Grant Park and Fort Dearborn (the former site of the fort is marked by plaques on Michigan Avenue and the Chicago River). And if you really want a busman's holiday, visit the Chicago Public Library's Harold Washington Library Center's Government Documents and Municipal Reference Department.

Sarah Erikson (serekson@chipublib.org), Government Information Librarian, Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago Public Library

Notes

1. Meredith Schwartz, "Conference on the Ice | ALA Midwinter 2015," *Library Journal*, February 3, 2015 http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/02/shows-events/ala/midwinter-on-ice-ala-midwinter-2015/#_.
2. Whet Moser, "Snowpocalypse Then: How the Blizzard of 1979 Cost the Election for Michael Bilandic," *Chicago Magazine*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/The-312/February-2011/Snowpocalypse-Then-How-the-Blizzard-of-1979-Cost-the-Election-for-Michael-Bilandic/>.
3. "Chicago Mayors," Chicago Public Library, accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.chipublib.org/chicago-mayors/>.
4. "Official Extreme Weather Records for Chicago, IL," National Weather Service National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.weather.gov/lot/Chicago_records.
5. George M. Eberhart, "Librarians on the March: At least 200 Information Professionals Join the Atlanta March," *The Scoop* (blog), January 21, 2017, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/librarians-on-the-march/>.
6. Daniel Walker, *Rights in Conflict: The Violent Confrontation of Demonstrators and Police in the Parks and Streets of Chicago during the Week of the Democratic National Convention of 1968. A Report Submitted by Daniel Walker, Director of the Chicago Study Team, to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* (New York: Bantam, 1968); Harry Kalven et al., *Dissent in a Free Society: A Report to the Citizens of Chicago on the City's Handling of Public Dissent in the Streets and Parks* (Chicago: publisher not identified, 1969).
7. "History of Grant Park 1830–1871," *Municipal Reference Guy* (blog), Chicago Public Library, November 3, 2014, <https://www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/history-of-grant-park-1830-1871/>.
8. Anne Durkin Keating, *Rising Up from Indian Country: the Battle of Fort Dearborn and the Birth of Chicago* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).
9. Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 26 vols (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1934–).