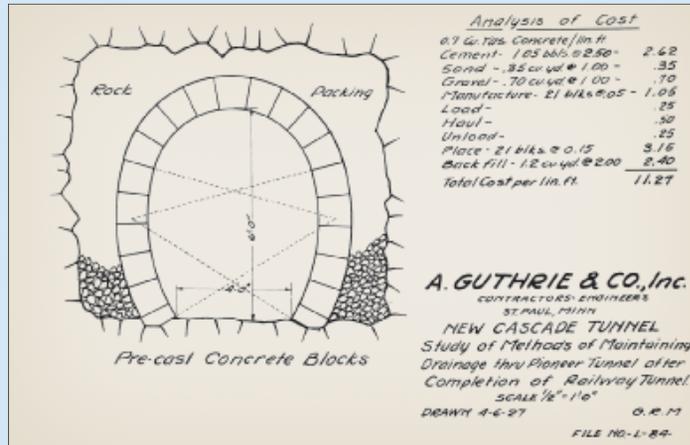
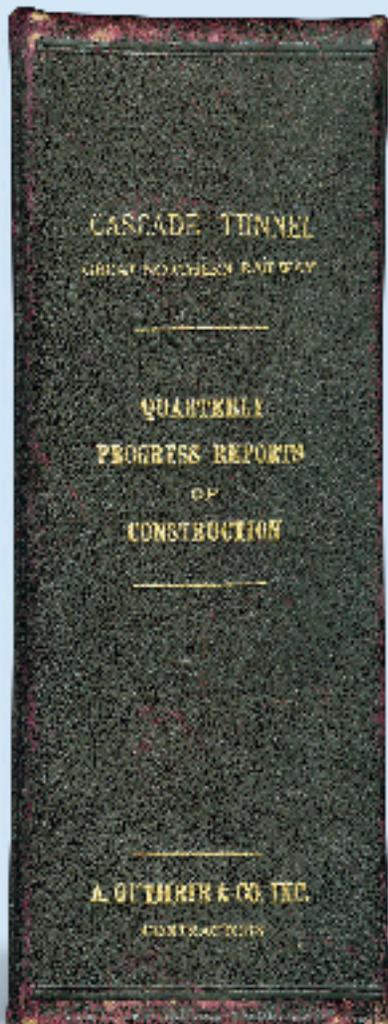


BETWEEN 1925 AND 1929, A. Guthrie and Co. of St. Paul designed and constructed a 7.79-mile tunnel for the Great Northern Railway under Stevens Pass in the Cascade Mountains of Washington state. A new acquisition by the Minnesota Historical Society documents the construction of this engineering marvel. Thirteen original quarterly progress reports by company vice president J. C. Baxter contain narrative descriptions, photographs, engineering drawings, tunnel profiles, camp-layout diagrams, and drawings of buildings in which 1,700 male and 100 female workers lived.

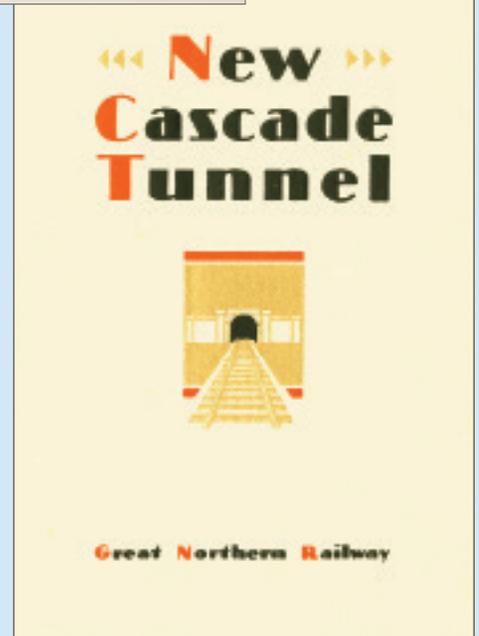


Samples from the well-preserved records documenting construction of a Great Northern Railway tunnel (MHS COLLECTIONS/JASON ONERHEIM)

These reports hold a wealth of information for business, engineering, social, and family history. In addition to the difficulties of carving through the several varieties of solid (or not-so-solid) rock, engineers had to plan for extensive water-intrusion problems and deadly ventilation issues. Wage scales generally ranged from sixty cents to one dollar per hour. The “camp flunkie” (job not defined) earned sixty dollars per month plus board; waitresses earned forty-five dollars per month and board.

The reports, which regularly decry the shortage of housing for families, show that camp life was well regulated. For example, the June 1, 1926, report notes, “Men are orderly; there is very little drinking and almost no radical talk.” Later that year: “Plans by employes [*sic*] committees for Christmas activities indicate that the holiday season on the New Cascade Tunnel will be a pleasant one. Each camp will have a community Christmas tree, as well as programs, dances and even a Swedish or Finnish cantata at Mill Creek.”

Safety programs loomed large during construction. The reports describe training programs as well as extensive investigations into the



numerous fatalities that occurred (genealogists take note of a new opportunity for conquering those “brick walls”). They also note the frequent visits of railroad and political officials and Japanese engineers.

Bound in a single volume, these reports were presented to H. L. Mundy, president of A. Guthrie. When the volume was recently offered for sale on eBay, the MHS successfully bid on it. After cataloging, these important records will be available in the Society’s library.

—Duane P. Swanson, curator of manuscripts



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