Collection: William Robert Mathewson Photograph Collection
Donor: Ruth E. Johnson
Accession Number: B1987.072
Processing Note: Collection processed by ARC Volunteer George Darrow, Winter 2009
Arrangement Note: Collection arrangement by Megan Peacock.
Description: Entire collection consists of photographs of the early construction of the Alaska Railroad. All photographs are black and white.

1. Postcard. Photographer: Noko (?) Sept. 13, 1915. Anchorage about a month ago, it looks much better now – we have our shack here is the reason. (Photograph shows “Tent City.”)


3. Postcard. Ship Creek, Alaska. Postmarked Anchorage, Alaska. Jul 10 am 1915. Dear Mother what do you think of this city, their [sic] are about 700 tents here – one of them belong to M. & R Co. We are having better weather here than in Oma. They say it has not been below zero here in 3 yrs. (Postcard addressed to: Mrs. W.J. Mathewson 2931 Deer Park Blvd Omaha, Nebr.

4. Postcard. Photographer: Noko (?) (Looking down 4th Ave towards the mountains. Pilger’s (?) General Store is on the left.

5. Postcard. Fourth Street. Anchorage. April 30, 1916. Photographer: G.L. Co. A small part of our city (heavy on city) for there are 7 or 8 Fords in town and a couple of real autos. (Sign on left above the clock reads: B.C. Nichols. The sign on the right reads: The Sydney Laurence Co. Photographers.)

6. (View of the tent city at Ship Creek) Anchorage Alaska August 24, 1915. Looking east over the former city, now the government yard, from the Gov’t Dock where our office is. The mountains are very beautiful in the evenings with the sun on them – this ground near the dock is covered with water at high tide – about every 8 hours it rises 52 feet here now. Will.


10. Anchorage, Alaska.


13. (Personnel are numbered from 1-19 on the front of the photograph) Personnel named on the front are:
   Jim Coates
   R.D. Chase
   Bill Peletier was boss of outside heavy stock machinery etc.
   E.R. McPhee was inching groceries
   Stenagr
   Me and my moccasins. Very worn in winter. Many others with shoe-packs and felt insoles.
   Walter Delong later Gen’l Storekeeper
   Bill Manning

(Written on the back): This photo was made by Sidney [sic] Laurence 1915. On old dock on Alaska Engineering Commission Ship Creek Dec. 1915, now Anchorage Alaska.

Employees of the Stores Department
#1 Forgotten
#2 Jim Coates, Warehouseman #1
#3 Joe Ryan, Warehouseman #2
#4 Tom Black * a very fine person “Masonic” (a former gold prospector now watchman)
#5 ----- Heath – a warehouseman #1
#6 Mcoy? Helper – material yard
#7 ---- Farmer, helper – warehouse
#8 Carl Sinclair (one-arm) typist (& homesteader)
#9 R.D. Chase, General Storekeeper No.1
#10 Bill Peletier, Chief Clerk
#11 ?? A warehouse man
#12 E.R. McPhee – Supt of large material yard
#13 W.R. (Christy) Mathewson – all-around stenographer and local purchasing agent
#14 T.S. Oliver – material stock clerk, later warehouseman foreman
Bill Richards & I arrived at Ship Creek landing {July 5, 1915 “SS Admiral Watson” anchored offshore approx. ¼ mile} A very low tide. We sloshed thru the slipper mud with approx. 50 passengers. There was a large Whse & no large docking facility. Small local gas boats would motor in on high tide and anchor in the Creek mouth that held approx. 5 ft. at low tode. This condition nearly one year.

(Across the bottom on the back): Bill Richards and I heard disturbing rumors at Valdez & Seward regarding living conditions… so we purchased an 8’ x 10’ tent on BLKS. Flour plus a slab of bacon.

(In left margin on back): Ramsey died suddenly during Xmas holiday… was born in China & his father was an English official. A wonderful guy!

(In right margin on back): We set up our tent about ¼ mile back of the Tent City. Several days later (unreadable) off account being squatters!!

(Writing on front of folded paper): Employee of the Alaskan Engineering Commission – Alaska Railraod also member of the 31st Ry regiment in France – WW#1 1918 -1919 Co. D.

(Writing on back of folded paper):
- Lincoln Nebr.
- Either in Lincoln
- Later named East Lincoln
- I attended school
- Our farm home

Bill Richards and I purchased this tent at Valdez when we learned that there was no housing available at Anchorage. Also we purchased 50 lbs of flour plus a slab of bacon.

This ballpark was a full-block and we all teams turned. All money received from the loyal fans that poured into the grandstand and bleachers. Also we paid Paddy Welch to use his team of horses to pull a harrow and a plank-drag over the ball field and it was smooth and professional.

Also we paid the Umpire! The carpenter had made a very sufficient locker-room underneath of the grand-stand, where we left our bats, gloves and the balls and the school kids help’d themselves after school and never stole a single article.

After the W-War #1, Ruth and I married (at Omaha.) How – about that---? And we traveled to Anchorage and I was employed in the office of the Trammaster – as Timekeeper – of all trainmen; also Depot Agents.

At this date they started a river-boat service out of Anchorage – North to the Talkeetna Dist. operating on the Susitna river; The project was to build the railroad to Fairbanks.

I was employed in the office [1st – R.D. Chase] of 2nd Walter DeLong → General Storekeeper of the Alaskan Engineering Commission later named The Alaska R.R. as a stenographer and local purchasing agent – buying emergency articles, tools, camp cooking utensils – also food; Plus hiking cooks (usually man & wife. Everything to hasten as start of construction of the railroad!)

My two night-school courses at the Boyles Business College in Omaha paid off excellent at Anchorage – Also when I enlisted in the Army.


(Written on the back): A.E.C. Ball Team June 20, 1920.

Upper row L to R
Mathewson
Johnson
Bayless
Wilt
Small
Frye
Johanson

Lower Row L to R
Crawford
X Harworth (a fireball) but an excellent ball player. He was killed several years later north of Seattle in a Roadhouse brawl ---?
Lynn
Berg
Stark
McDonald
Meyers
Balhisier
W.G. Witt – Manager Chief Clerk in Mechanical Dept. Alaska Railroad, Anchorage. I was rated as Principle Clerk plus timekeeper for all traincrews, enginemen, station agents. Also river steamboat crews operating on the Tanana and Yukon rivers.

We had many railroad construction train crew skattered between Seward and Fairbanks. I had to account for all work time and charge to each specific project. Several of the crews were always trying to fudge on their time and I checked them against the Dispatchers train sheets that were accurate and revealed every move and I charged the cost of ballast spread or “fills” also “ties”, rails, spikes and plats to specified accounts.

Shorty Conway – 3rd base
Wally McDonald
MJ McDonald catcher
Bill Darwin pitcher
Christy Mathewson (1st base)
Major
Cedar pitcher Lefty
Vic Nelson pitcher R-Hand
Tom Haines 2nd base
Smoky Joe Shulte fielder
Eddie Monan shortshop
? Mascot
Wilford Stump fielder

Com. B. 59th Inf. (on left)
A.E. Commission (in center)
Legion City (on right)

(written on the back):
“Legion”
Bill Darwin
Chas Bush
MJ MacDonald
Art Lilystrand
Wally MacDonald
Turman Purish
------- Danforth
Vic Nelson
Chas Bush Jr.
Christy
Herman Glossop

“Comm.” Team”
? ----
Hank Stoy
---- Marsh
---- Boomer?
Doc Thompson
Clarence Johanson
Lefty Lein
---- Simms
Paul Bloomer
Jake Ferrell
Herb Beebe
? Mascot
---- Major
Eddie Monson
Chas. Balhiser

“Soldier Team”
I failed to write their names but did not know only a few by name.

Photographer: Sydney Laurence.

Photographer: P.S. Hunt.


23. A.E.C. Cottage No. 28 – No. 24, 25,26, 27, 33, 34, 35, Same Style. A.E.C. Photo No. G-1249. Photographer: H.G.K. (Photograph shows a cottage with three unidentified people standing front of it. The woman on the porch is hold in a small dog. A "Flexible Flyer" type of sled is leaning against the porch railing.)

(Photograph shows a railroad water tank and a man riding a railroad speeder?)

25. Looking south over Bridge 49-3. April 12-1921. Two locs and plow buried. (Photograph shows a tram and trestle that have been destroyed by a snowslide.) A.E.C. G-1735.
Photographer: H.G. Kaiser
Photographer: H.G. Kaiser.
I was timekeeper and principal clerk in the Superintendent office.
Halfway between Seward to Anchorage.
One the Alaska Railroad
(Photograph shows a rotary plow being pushed across a wooden trestle by two locomotives.)


30. An old trapper cabin beside the Susitna River Sept. 1916. Alongside of the new Alaska RR right-of-way under construction. Several years later I was assigned as a timekeeper and Camp Manager at Curry when they rebuilt the Alaska R.R. and extended it to Fairbanks.

31. Scene on the old-original Alaska-Northern Railroad approx. 20 miles north of Seward. I think this was narrow-gage???(Photograph shows railroad tracks and a small trestle in mountainous terrain.)

32. Postcard: A.E.C. Boat Matanuska. This was year 1915 or 1916. Photographer: Sydney Laurence. (Photograph shows three horses standing in front of the riverboat.)

33. We had two of this type riverboats. We could feel them bump over rocks that were smoothes by spring ice breakup. They were contracted and constructed by the Barrington brothers Sid and Ben (?) whom had constructed similar boats and operated them on the fast and wicked Skeena River in Canada. They were equipped w/ two powerful motors (forward with a very long drive shaft and it extended back to propeller – the propeller rode above a skid type shoe that raised in shallow water and eased down when in deeper water. I could hear them approx two miles away. (I had to check off supplies & employees.) (Photograph shows a barge-like riverboat carrying supplies and personnel. Sign on boat reads B&B No. 3.)

34. This locomotive was derailed by melting snow and ice that built up like a small glacier.
   The brakeman was riding in the locomotive cab this time on account of the snow was melting and flooding the tracks in this dangerous area, and he was killed in the engine.
   I remember Charles (Charley) Odd was the victim at this accident, and he was watching ahead and apparently could not see the glacial ice that had spread over the rails.
   I was working in the Supt office as TimeKeepers at this time WRM. My mostly duty was Timekeeper for all trainmen also Depot Agents. Also river steamboat crews on

35. Alaska RR. This train was caught by a snow and rock slide out south near Girdwood station. (Photograph shows a derailed locomotive and tender.)

36. Eagle River Bridge – 12 miles from Anchorage. Photographer: NOKO (?) (Photograph shows a log railroad trestle across Eagle River.)

37. Postcard. Old Greek Church Seldovia. Approximately 40 miles west of Anchorage. (Note: Seldovia is over 200 road miles from Anchorage.) Photographer: Sydney Laurence.


Dear friends:
Around about 3:30 yesterday & no boat due until 6 tonight. Wind blowing a gale. Suppose Mrs. Baughman (?) told you about the records & pictures we left with Mr. Jennings for you? I bagged the records so don’t blame me if they aren’t good. Bob & Brownie.

(Postcard of Seward date-stamped November 11, 1926[?] showing the dock. Resurrection Bay is in the middle background.

39. Main business street of Talkeetna. Summer 1916. Indian graves at left. J.J.H.D (?) (Early photograph of Talkeetna showing walled tents.)
Subject Terms

Alameda (Steamship)
Alaska Engineering Commission
Alaska Northern Railway
Alaska Railroad
Anchorage
Avalanches
Baseball
Baseball Teams
Chugach Mountains
Cook Inlet
Docks, piers, and wharves
Houses and buildings
Log cabins
Matanuska (Boat)
Mountains
People
Resurrection Bay
Riverboats
Running
Sawmills
Seldovia
Seward
Sleds and sledding
Talkeetna

People:

Balhisier, Charlie
Bayless (A.E.C.)
Beebe, Herb
Berg (A.E.C.)
Bloomer, Paul
Bush, Chas
Bush, Chas, Jr.
Cedar (A.E.C.)
Chase, R.D.
Christy
Coates, Jim
Conway, Shorty
Danforth
Darwin, Bill
DeLong, Walter
Ferrell, Jake
Frye (A.E.C.)
Glossop, Herman
Haines, Tom
Harworth, (A.E.C.)
Hewitt, Art
Johanson, Clarence
Johanson, Frank
Johnson (A.E.C.)
Lein, Lefty
Lilystrand, Art
Lynn (A.E.C.)
McDonald (A.E.C.)
McDonald, M.J.
McDonald, Walter
McPhee, E.R.
Major (A.E.C.)
Manning, Bill
Marsh
Mathewson, Christy
Meyers (A.E.C.)
Monan, Eddie
Monson, Eddie
Nelson, Vic
Oliver, T.S.
Peletier, Bill
Pilger, Newt W.
Punsh, Truman
Shulte, Joe (Smoky)
Simms
Sinclair, Carl
Small (A.E.C.)
Stark (A.E.C.)
Stenagr, (Mr.)
Stoy, Hank
Stump, Wilford
Thomson, Doc
Voss, George
Wilt, W.G.