

REFERENCE CODE: AkAMH

REPOSITORY NAME:

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TITLE: Robert Acheson Collection

COLLECTION NUMBER: B2009.061

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Dates: ca. 1898-1919; 1948

Extent: .25 linear feet

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): Photograph credits include C. A. Boerner, Larss & Duclos, Huey, E. O. Ellingsen, F. H. Nowell, Johnson, Moose Johnson, Clemons, Cantwell, and P. S. Hunt.

Administrative/Biographical History: Robert Stanley Acheson (1908-1993) was born in Alaska, son of William Wellesley Acheson (1875-1945) and Mary McDevitt Acheson (1884?-1968). His father came to Alaska in 1898 to drive cattle from Valdez, and later had meat markets in Ester, Iditarod, and Flat. The family moved to LaConner, Washington in 1918. Robert Acheson returned to Alaska in 1930 to work on a survey crew and then returned to Seattle. He moved with his mother and oldest sister to the gold-mining town of Flat around 1938, to work as a junior partner in the general mercantile and freighting business.

Acheson's employer, Harry Donnelley, was a major figure in the commercial world of Flat with involvement in banking, freighting, assaying, meat warehousing, hardware, pipe, lumber, and fuel distribution. He owned the Donnelley and Sheppard Store and was the local distributor for Standard Oil products, was the Chevrolet dealer, controlled the Day Navigation riverboat company, and was one of the largest employers in the town. Mining activity dropped off during World War II and with the loss of business and population, the area entered a long decline.

Harry Donnelley closed the store in Flat in 1948. In October of that year he and Robert Acheson purchased the W. J. Erskine Company store on the Kodiak waterfront. This store had

been bought by the Erskine family in 1911 from the Alaska Commercial Company, the San Francisco-based company which descended from the Russian-American Company. Robert Acheson operated the Kodiak store which was renamed Donnelley and Acheson. Harry Donnelley was the senior partner but retired to Bellevue, Washington, visiting Kodiak each summer until his death in 1960. The store remained in operation until 1962 when Acheson, the surviving partner, decided to liquidate it, just ahead of the 1964 earthquake which would destroy it. Other Kodiak businesses—the D & A Building Company and D & A Motor Company—continued in business after the earthquake, but Bob and his wife Betty Acheson retired to Ellensburg, Washington, to operate a cattle ranch in 1966. He died there in 1993.¹

Scope and Content Description: The collection consists of a hand-colored envelope addressed to Bob Atchison [sic] and its probable contents, a 1948 newsletter, *Northern Winds* (March 1948) for the Catholic mission school at Holy Cross, Alaska, and 118 black & white photographs. Most of the photographs have a connection to the Northern Commercial Company; in fact, many are stamped on their backs with purple ink, all in the same font, implying that they may have been part of a documentary collection for the company. Other photographs are stamped “Ed. S. Orr Stage Co.” in the same font, also with purple ink. Subject matter of the photographs is primarily Northern Commercial village stores, the towns where they were located, and sleds, sleighs, and watercraft. Many of the photographs have been removed from an album and have bits of black paper still adhering to their backs.

The connection of the Acheson family to the photographs is uncertain. Accompanying the collection is a note from Robert Acheson’s daughter Jill written in 2009 saying that “We wish we knew how or where these photos came to the Acheson clan, but between our 2 sets of great-grandparents, who were both in the North at the turn of the century, and our own folks & several uncles, the source could have been anyone.”

Arrangement: Three-ring binder. The donor provided captioned dividers that group the photos by region. Although these are not always accurate, the donor’s arrangement has been retained.

¹ Milton W. Bush, Jr., *Acheson Family History* (Durham, CT: 2004), pp. 20-21 [in donor file]; “End of the Trail” [Mrs. Mary Lewis Acheson], *Alaska Sportsman*, February 1969, p. 54; Yule Chaffin, *Koniag to King Crab: Alaska’s Southwest* ([Anchorage?]: Chaffin, 1967, pp. 144-145; Rolfe G. Buzzell and Darrell L. Lewis, *Historic Building Survey Report: Flat, Alaska* (Anchorage, Alaska : U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management ; State of Alaska, Dept. of Natural Resources, [1997]), pp. 11-22; Rolfe G. Buzzell, ed., *Flat and Iditarod 1993-1995 Oral History Interviews* (Anchorage, Alaska : U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management : State of Alaska, Dept. of Natural Resources, [1997]).

CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS AND USE

Restrictions on Access: The collection is open for research use.

Physical Access: Photographs are in good condition. One image, .93, has been torn and repaired.

Technical Access: No special equipment is needed to access the materials.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Preferred Citation: Robert Acheson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2009.061

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition and Appraisal Information: Donated to Anchorage Museum by the Acheson family in 2009.

SUBJECTS

Fitzgerald, Gerald
Alaska Commercial Company
Northern Commercial Company
Tanana Valley Railroad Company
Ed S. Orr Stage Company
Victoria (Steamship)
Melville Dollar (Ship)
M. L. Washburn (Steamboat)
Sarah (Steamboat)
Susie (Riverboat)
Hannah (Riverboat)
Schwatka (Riverboat)
Mink (Barge)
Tanana (Riverboat)
Elk (Barge)
Dredges—Yukon—Klondike River Valley
Flumes
Sleighs
Sled dogs
Horses

Bulldozers
Roadhouses—Alaska
Holy Cross (Alaska)
Kolmakof (Alaska)
Innoko (Alaska)
Boerner (Alaska)
McGrath (Alaska)
Takotna (Alaska)
Dikeman (Alaska)
Bethel (Alaska)
Crow Village (Alaska)
Georgetown (Alaska)
Kuskokwim River Valley (Alaska)—History
Russian Mission (Alaska)
Dawson (Yukon)
Tagish (Yukon)
Fortymile (Yukon)
Fairbanks (Alaska)
Tanana (Alaska)
Circle (Alaska)
Nenana (Alaska)
Saint Michael (Alaska)
Eagle (Alaska)
Nulato (Alaska)
Louden (Alaska)
St. Marys (Alaska)
Marshall (Alaska)
Ruby (Alaska)
Anvik (Alaska)
Long City (Alaska)
Valdez (Alaska)
Copper Center (Alaska)
Gulkana (Alaska)

Detailed Description of the Collection

Divider: Kuskokwim

.1—Kalmakofsky [Kolmakof] warm storage / fish house / rat proof—these buildings built in 1836—July 23, 1912

.2—Fitzgerald Survey [donor added further information: “Gerald Fitzgerald Chief Topographer of the Alaskan Branch of USGS”; man standing with plane table on top of mountain]

.3—Max Simoli Store. Innoko.

.4—Summer packing to Ophir from N.C. Co’s store. Hear roosters crowing in crate on horse to right? July—1917

- .5—Laundry at Boerner [man standing at washtub in winter, outside small snow-covered log structure with sign: “Laundry and Bath House”]
- .6—U.S. Mail cabin, stable & cache “Gold Stream” Route 78115
- .7—Looking down the Porcupine [River] just below Rampart House. Side hills are about 500’ high.
- .8—N.C. Co. stage “spike team” at “Discovery Road House” Sullivan Creek. 3/17/08 [three-horse team pulling bob sled, in front of log building]
- .9—N.C. Co. store & dwelling / McGrath 1/13/20
- .10—Reliance City [Fort Reliance, Yukon Territory, just downstream from Dawson? Probably not: that trading post was abandoned in 1886 when gold was found on the Stewart River.² This image is apparently taken from a height—such as the deck of a sternwheeler—so must be on a large Interior river. The canoe in the foreground appears to be of Athabaskan design.]
- .11—L. T. Erwin’s wood team at Fbks. [Lewis T. Erwin is listed as a Fairbanks “wood dealer” in the Polk’s *Alaska-Yukon Gazetteers* for 1909 and 1911.]³
- .12—Buildings of N[orthern] C[ommercial] Co. at Kuskokwim Station, Tocatna [Takotna] River. Warm storage building, log, 20 x 20 iron roof in rear of iron warehouse.
- .13—Thos. Byrd and Mrs. Bolton on Ophir Trail
- .14—“Discovery” (town) Otter Creek / June 3, 1910
- .15—Pleasure party from Tocatna [Takotna]
- .16—Pleasure party from Tocatna [Takotna]
- .17—17 Goldstream [icy flumes in winter; credit on front of photo: “C.A. Boerner, Photo”]
- .18—Interior store of N.C. Co. at Boerner. [credit on front of photo: “C.A. Boerner, Photo”]
- .19—Boyd’s freighting outfit with pleasure party from Tocatna [Takotna]
- .20—Moravian Mission Bethel
- .21—Dr. Hall’s horse [horse pulling sleigh with man in fur coat]
- .22—Bob Menzies and Joe Mathews [horse pulling two men in sleigh]
- .23—Dikeman
- .24—N.C. Co. cargo carrier to Kuskokwim 1911 [ship *Melville Dollar*]
- .25—Crow Village on Kuskokwim River
- .26—Georgetown on Kuskokwim River
- .27—Indians with porcupine on Kuskokwim
- .28—Indians on Kuskokwim River
- .29—Big River Indians [credit on front of photo: “C.A. Boerner, Photo”]
- .30—Russian Mission on Kuskokwim [credit on front of photo: “C.A. Boerner, Photo”]

Divider: Dawson

- .31—Alaskan Dog Team Eskimo Style

² R. C. Coutts, *Yukon Places & Names* (Sidney, British Columbia: Gray’s Publishing, 1980, p. 104.

³ David A. Hales, Margaret N. Heath and Gretchen L. Lake, *An Index to Dawson City, Yukon Territory and Alaska Directory and Gazetteer, Alaska-Yukon Directory and Gazetteer, and Polk’s Alaska-Yukon Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1901-1912, Volume II (C-E)* (Fairbanks: Alaska & Yukon Polar Regions Department, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1995), p. 33.

- .32—*M. L. Washburn* [sternwheeler]⁴
- .33—Dawson [barge and sternwheelers in front of waterfront wharves]
- .34—Freighting on Lake Labarge / Spring 1916 [tractor pulling freight sleds]
- .35—#1 Above Eldorado
- .36—James Nelson & Johnson Discovery on Eldorado
- .37—Mouth Bonanza Creek
- .38—Fresh Fruits—Dawson Market
- .39—*Sarah* [sternwheeler]
- .40—A[laska] C[ommercial] Co. Employees, Dawson, Y.T. [photo credit: Larss & Duclos / Succrs to Hegg & Co.]
- .41—[two miners underground]
- .42—Tagish Post. Custom House. Copyright 1898 [boats on shore; photo credit: Larss & Duclos Photos. Dawson]
- .43—Trail near the mouth of the Klondyke River [photo credit: Larss & Duclos. Photos. Dawson. 1900]
- .44—White Horse Rapids, Yukon River, Y. T.
- .45—Clouds / Andrews
- .46—Completed flume / Y[ukon] C[onsolidated] G[old] C[orporation] Ditch Dawson [Tombstone Mountains, north of Dawson?]
- .47—Social Hall of N. N. Co.'s Yukon River Packet *Susie* [photo credit: Huey]
- .48—Dining Saloon of N. N. Co.'s Yukon River Packet *Susie* [photo credit: Huey]
- .49—*Susie* and waterfront Dawson
- .50—*Susie* coming in to Dawson [photo credit: Miles]
- .51—W[hite] P[ass] & Y[ukon] R[ailway] tractor from White Horse to Lower LeBarge / 10 tons each car / 1913
- .52—Part of N. C. Co. Grocery Department [photo credit: E. O. Ellingsen]
- .53—[three horse-drawn firefighting wagons in front of firehouse—not in Alaska or Yukon?]
- .54—[horses and sleds in deep snow]
- .55—[N.C. Co. buildings, Dawson]
- .56—[six-horse team pulling wagon in front of unidentified N. C. Co. building]
- .57—General rear view / Dawson Y. T.
- .58—[freight team in front of Dawson store]
- .59—A. E. Store / Block D [same photo as .58]
- .60—[sternwheeler *Hannah* pushing barges—on Yukon River?]
- .61—Forty Mile
- .62—Dawson / Block C, 2nd Avenue Looking North
- .63—[waterfront scene in Fairbanks showing the California Saloon, Pioneer Hotel, Pioneer Dock, and Fairbanks Daily Times; the sternwheeler *Schwatka* is tied up behind the barge *Mink* photo credit: F. H. Nowell]
- .64—Discovery Dredge Bonanza Creek / August 28, 1906 [photo credit: Wolfe Photo Dawson Y.T. '06]

⁴ For descriptions of sternwheeler riverboats in this collection, see *Saga of Famed Packets and Other Steamboats of Mighty Yukon River*, compiled by W. D. McBride [MacBride], excerpted from *Cariboo and Northwest Digest*, Winter 1948 and Spring 1949 issues.

- .65—Dawson [two-horse team pulling wagon with “N.C. Co.” painted on side, in front of corrugated metal building with “Machinery Depot / Engines. Boilers. Steam. / Pumps. Hoists. Fittings. / N. C. Co.”]
- .66—Dawson [view of waterfront showing N. C. buildings with unknown sternwheeler tied up]

Divider: Tanana / Nenana

- .67—*Tanana* [sternwheeler with crowd of men on deck]
- .68—Tanana / Fall 1907 [Northern Commercial Co. store]
- .69—Jas. Lyle and B. B. Green at Tacotna [Takotna] [two men and dog in front of log buildings]
- .70—Indian Wood Yard. Tauchaket[?]. Tanana River
- .71—Circle [riverfront buildings include Northern Commercial Co. / McQuesten & Co. and N. C. Co.]
- .72—Circle / N. C. Co. office Chena [railroad tracks in foreground indicate this is Chena, not Circle. Log building in center of photo has sign over door reading “Northern Navigation Co.”]
- .73—N. C. Co. store Nenana / taken July 1919
- .74—Tanana Valley R. R. [engine and cars stopped on bridge]
- .75—N. C. Co’s store Tanana
- .76—Tanana 1907 [log building with sign: Northern Commercial Co.,” taken in summer but an unusual dog sled is in center, holding an infant]
- .77—[four-horse team pulling loaded “Fairbanks Valdez Stage,” photo taken in Fairbanks (in background is “Brumbaugh Hamilton & Kellogg Foundry and Blacksmith”); photo credit: Johnson]

Divider: Yukon / St. Michael

- .78—St. Michael [view across water to “Hotel Healy Annex”]
- .79—St. Michael
- .80—View of the Cove and Shipyard from the old Russian Fort / St. Michael Alaska. Oct. 20th. 1912 / “after all the Boats were hauled out” / J.R.M. [about ten sternwheelers and other boats including *Hannah*]
- .81—U. S. Government school St. Michael [early winter scene: teacher (?) at far left, students in center, student in fur hat taunting a chained bear at left]
- .82—St. Michael / N. A. T. & T. Co. Plant, Water Front, St. Michael [early winter scene, sternwheelers on ways at left, Hotel Healy at right]
- .83—St. Michael [view from water]
- .84—Holy Cross Mission, 1913
- .85—[postcard of Front Street, Eagle, Alaska: 4/11/07 “A Busy day” / This is the view which greeted me upon my return—only it is worse. / F. N. Smith (?). Addressed to Mr. M. L. Washburn, 320 Sansome Str, San Francisco, Cal. / c/o N. C. Co.]
- .86—Nulato Station [log buildings on riverbank, small boats, including a Native canoe, pulled up on shore]
- .87—Calico Bluff on Yukon [photo credit: C. A. Boerner, Photo]
- .88—Louden, Alaska on the Yukon River. 50 Miles above Koyukuk

- .89—Andreaofsky / Oil tank and Dwellings—Andreaofsky [St. Marys]
- .90—Miners / Marshall City / 10-9-13 [men on barges, one named *Elk*, sternwheeler in background; photo credit: Moose Johnson]
- .91—New Strike—Wilson Creek / Marshall City / 10-9-13 [photo credit: Moose Johnson]
- .92—*S. S. Victoria* in the ice Behring Sea, June 1908 [photo credit: Huey]
- .93—Ruby, Alaska. Oct 1911 [sternwheeler *Sarah* under power with three barges attached; photo credit: Clemons] Photo torn and repaired.
- .94—Ruby, Alaska. At Midnight. June 21, 1912. 12-5A.M.—Time F.16 3 seconds; photo credit: Clemons]
- .95—N. C. Co. Ruby 1912 [photo credit: Clemons]
- .96—Looking up First Ave. from Northern Commercial Co. Ruby, Alaska. Sep. 1912 [photo credit: Clemons] On back: “Must be returned to NCCo. J.F.”
- .97—Moving mining machinery to creeks. Ruby, Alaska. Apr. 13, 1912 [horse teams pulling sleds with boilers; photo credit: Clemons]
- .98—Sherborn Ave. Long City, Ruby Mining Dist. Alaska [log and tent structures, in foreground, men and woman in front of tent with signs: “Discovery Road House / Meals at all Hours” and “Telephone Pay Station;” photo credit: Clemons]
- .99—Episcopal Mission, Anvik, Alaska [photo credit: F. H. Nowell]
- .100—Mission children, Holy Cross, Alaska [children interrupted while digging in riverside potato field, sternwheeler *Hannah* in background; photo credit: F. H. Nowell]
- .101—N.C. Co. store Nulato [log buildings, rowboat pulled up on shore; photo credit: F. H. Nowell]

Divider: Ed S. Orr Stage Co.

- .102—Salmon River Road House. Arrived here 2:30pm. Too late to go to next place. Dec. 9-12. Meals 2.00
- .103—N.C. Co. stage on Yukon River opposite Mission Bluff—4 miles above Tanana / 3/18/08 [stamped on back: “Ed. S. Orr Stage Co.”]
- .104—Yost’s Road House, Delta River, 206 miles from Valdez / March 5, 1910
- .105—[six-horse team pulling loaded sled in front of log building with sign: “Ed. S. Orr Stage Line. / Chitina-Fairbanks Winter Stage Line”]
- .106—The “Switchback” on the Trail to the Summit. On back of photo: Upper end of switchbacks / 260 double ender sleds were working at one time this season freighting up to Summit [photo credit: Cantwell / Valdez Alaska]
- .107—Summit Road House and Freight Caches, Thomson Pass [photo credit: P.S. Hunt]
- .108—[four-horse team pulling loaded sled: “U.S. Mail. N.C. Co. Tanana-Fairbanks Stage.”]
- .109—Looking down Broadway / Valdez, Alaska. [photo credit: P.S. Hunt]
- .110—Freighting near Icy Point, Thompsons Pass [on back of photo: “Shows width of trail nearing Icy Point going up Summit;” photo credit: Cantwell / Valdez Alaska]
- .111—Through the Gap. Thompsons Pass [photo credit: Cantwell]
- .112—Residences in Valdez, Alaska. [photo credit: P.S. Hunt]
- .113—[horses with sleds on mountain slope, and one man with bicycle; photo credit: Johnson]
- .114—[log buildings with signs: “Salchaket Trading Post and Road House / W. F. Munson, Prop.]

.115—Blix's Copper Center Road House / Alaska Commercial Co. [interior view, including phonograph with wax cylinders in a rack on the wall, magazines on a table, and a poster advertising the Ed. S. Orr Co.]

.116—[Gulkana Road House with Ed. S. Orr stage in front]

.117—Donnelleys Road House [horses and sleds, log buildings in background; photo credit: Johnson]

.118—Paxtons Road House [Pioneer Hotel—log building with Fairbanks Valdes [sic] Stage in front; photo credit: Johnson]

Guide written: June 28, 2012