

**REFERENCE CODE:** AkAMH

**REPOSITORY NAME:**

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Guide prepared by: Amy Valentine, Archivist; Sydney Durst, Cook Inlet Historical Society Intern

**TITLE:** Watts Family Collection

**COLLECTION NUMBER:** B2026.002

**OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION**

Dates: 1940s-2026

Extent: 1 box

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): Richard Watts Jr., Richard Watts Sr., Anna Watts, Imperial Professional Photo Service, Jim Lavrakas, Anchorage Daily News, Philadelphia Tribune

**Administrative/Biographical History:**

Born in Philadelphia, Richard "Dick" Joseph Watts Sr. (b. 1915, d. 2004) was a civil rights worker, entrepreneur, and self-taught musician. Prior to moving to Alaska, he co-owned Watts Zanzibar with his brother, Robert "Bobby" Watts Sr. The jazz club was well-known and in operation for five years, until the nightclub business hit a slump. The Watts brothers sold the club and in 1949 Richard Sr. moved to Alaska where he purchased a barbershop. Four months later he was joined by his wife Anna and young son Richard Watts Jr.<sup>1</sup>

Although far from Philadelphia, the Watts family chose Anchorage for their new home after hearing that discrimination was less prevalent in Alaska. Unfortunately, the Black community still experienced racism through redlining, limited job opportunities, and racial taunts.<sup>2</sup> In response, Anna and Richard Sr. fought discrimination by joining many civil rights causes and in

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<sup>1</sup> "Dick 'Zanzibar' Watts Tries Luck in Alaska." *Philadelphia Tribune*, 1949 or 1950.

<sup>2</sup> David A. James, "Civil Rights Pioneer: Meet Richard Watts," *Alaska Magazine*, February 2026, p. 34 and 36. See F3 below.

1951 helped found the NAACP Anchorage Branch. In May 1979, Watts Sr. received a NAACP Certificate of Life Membership.

During his lifetime, Mr. Watts also received the “Pioneer Alaskan Award, presented jointly by the local Chapter of the NAACP and the Alaska Black Caucus. He was instrumental in forming the first Prince Hall Masons in Alaska and served as its first Grand Master. He also served as a member of the Home Federal Savings & Loan Board.”<sup>3</sup>

In addition to her community activism, Anna Virginia Watts (b. 1918, d. 1969) was a mother of two to Richard Jr. and Cecilia Alford and was self-taught in secretarial skills. She was the first Secretary of NAACP Anchorage Branch 1000 and “was instrumental in forming the first Order of the Eastern Stars in Alaska and served as one of its Worthy Matrons. Mrs. Watts was also a founding member and President of the Northern Lights Civic and Social Club and was Co-Owner of Dick Watts Import and Export Company.”<sup>4</sup>

Like his parents, Richard Watts Jr. also fought discrimination as a civil rights worker. In 1963 at the age of sixteen, he became a picketer at the Carrs Grocery boycott. The boycott was spearheaded by the Fairview neighborhood after the local grocer refused to hire Black Alaskans, despite the Black community making up thirty percent of its customer base.<sup>5</sup> Following the picket, Watts Jr. was hired as a bagger and became the first Black Alaskan in a customer-facing role at Carrs. “I worked my butt off to be the best and fastest bagger they had. I did twice as much work as any box boy there,” Watts said. “I had the Black Community on my back... If I failed, the whole community would fail. Because I was representing them.”<sup>6</sup>

Watts was soon promoted to cashier, then to dairy and freezer, followed by night manager, and then store manager. All the while, Richard had finished high school and attended the Alaska Methodist University and the University of Alaska at Anchorage. He’d also married and had three children, Connie, Thomas, and Michael.<sup>7</sup> By the time of his retirement in 2017, Watts had become the District Operations Manager and was responsible for all operations in one Alaska district, overseeing fifteen stores across the state.<sup>8</sup>

Today, Richard Watts Jr. continues to serve as a pillar in the Anchorage community and endeavors to continue helping others. Below is a non-comprehensive list some of the honors and awards both he and his father received for their professional and community-centered work.

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<sup>3</sup> Program for *Soul in the Cemetery* at Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery, Anchorage, 2023. See B2026.002.43.

<sup>4</sup> Program for *Soul in the Cemetery* at Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery, Anchorage, 2023. See B2026.002.43.

<sup>5</sup> Ian C. Hartman and David Reamer, “Civil Rights Under the Northern Lights,” in *Black Lives in Alaska: A History of African Americans in the Far Northwest* (University of Washington Press, 2022), 113.

<sup>6</sup> David A. James, “Civil Rights Pioneer: Meet Richard Watts,” *Alaska Magazine*, February 2026, p. 34 and 36. See F3 below.

<sup>7</sup> Norsworthy, Becky. “Watts Rises From Boxboy to top.” *The Anchorage Times*, 20 June 1979, P. 22.

<sup>8</sup> David A. James, “Civil Rights Pioneer: Meet Richard Watts,” *Alaska Magazine*, February 2026, p. 34 and 36. See F3 below.

- NAACP plaque presented to Richard Watts Sr. & Jr. on February 17, 2002, in recognition for vital service to the Anchorage Community and the Anchorage Branch of the N.A.A.C.P (See B2026.002.41)
- NAACP plaque Civil Right Activist Award presented to Richard Joseph Watts, Sr., in recognition as a founder of the Anchorage Branch of the Anchorage Branch of NAACP and a front-line civil rights worker, September 25, 2004.
- Alaska State Legislature In Memoriam of Richard “Dickie” Watts Sr., February 11, 2005.
- Engraved clock award given to Richard Watts Jr. for 25 years at Carr-Gottstein, 1965-1990.
- Wheaties Champion Richard Watts, Safeway GATC District Manager, Anchorage All Star Team.
- Carrs-Safeway retirement glass sculpture award, presented to Richard Watts Jr. for all his years of dedicated service, 1967-2017.
- Richard Watts Jr. was honored as an African American Trailblazer by the Shiloh Community, Inc. Media Justice Project, 2019.
- Plaque award from the NAACP Anchorage presented to Richard J. Watts Jr. for his Renowned Civic Engagement, September 7, 2019. (See B2026.002.42)
- Fairview Civics Hero sign honoring Social Justice Advocates, Richard Watts Sr. and Jr.
- Plaque and pen awarded to Richard Watts Jr. and others as Juneteenth Trailblazers. Presented by the 2024 Juneteenth Committee to the recipients in appreciation for hosting the first public Juneteenth event in Anchorage, 1982.
- Alaska’s Black History Makers Ball, honoring Richard Watts Sr. and Jr., February 28, 2026. (See B2026.002.44)
- The Alaska Black Caucus Ebony Aurora Award presented to Richard Watts Jr. on June 15, 2026. (See B2026.002.45)
- Plaque awarded to Richard Watts Sr. & Jr. for committed service and dedication to the Fairview community.

**Scope and Content Description:**

Collection contains 41 photographic prints, 1 digitized photograph, copies of newspaper clippings, event programs and booklets, and 1 Alaska Magazine featuring a profile on Richard Watts Jr. The collection also includes a 1940s glossy print page spotlighting the Watts Zanzibar jazz club in Philadelphia.

Arrangement: Collection arranged by format.

**CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS AND USE**

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

Physical Access: Some original items are damaged. Most materials are in fair to good condition.

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

#### Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

The Anchorage Museum is the owner of the materials and makes available reproductions for research, publication, and other uses. Written permission must be obtained from the Anchorage Museum before any reproduction use. The Anchorage Museum does not necessarily hold copyright to all of the materials in the collections. In some cases, permission for use may require seeking additional authorization from the copyright owners.

#### Preferred Citation:

Watts Family Collection, Anchorage Museum, B2026.2

### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

#### Acquisition and Appraisal Information

Collection donated by Richard Watts Jr. on July 10, 2026.

#### Processing Notes

The Watts Family Collection initially came to the Anchorage Museum Archives as a larger personal collection on temporary deposit with the intention of partial donation. The deposited materials were digitized and photographed for use in the 2026 Alaska Black History Maker's Ball presentation and items not donated were returned to Mr. Watts. Researchers can access a printed copy of the final presentation located in *VF – Black Community – Events*.

Additionally, a link to the 2026 Alaska Black History Makers Ball video was provided to Archives staff by Mr. Watts. The video has been copied to a thumb drive for the Accession File as a non-accessioned item. The Anchorage Museum does not hold copyright to this video but does have permission from the creator to share the video link with honorees and/or their families.

The first image in the collection (.1) was digitized by Archives staff, and the original hand-tinted photo print was returned to Mr. Watts. Similarly, newspaper materials were also copied and/or scanned and the originals returned. Copy prints have been created for researcher access.

### **RELATED MATERIALS**

B1977.104 Zula Swanson Photographs

B2021.004 Ed Wesley Collection

B2022.002 Cal Williams Collection

Subject Guide – Alaska's BPOC Subject Guide

VF – Black Community

E185.93 .A4 H37 2022

*Black Lives in Alaska : A History of African Americans in the Far Northwest*, Ian C. Hartman and David Reamer, 2022

E185.93 .A4084 1988

*Black On a Background of White : A Chronicle of Afro-Americans' Involvement in America's Last Frontier, Alaska*, Everett Louis Overstreet, 1988.

E185.93 H38 2020

*Black History in the Last Frontier*, Ian C. Hartman, 2020.

Black Lives in Alaska: Journey, Justice, Joy (Exhibit, 2022)

See Us, Know Us (Video, 2023)

## **SUBJECTS**

Watts, Anna

Watts, Richard Jr.

Watts, Richard Sr.

Activism

Civil rights workers

Clippings (Books, newspapers, etc.)

Families, Black

NAACP—Anchorage (Alaska)

Prince Hall Masonic Lodge—Anchorage (Alaska)

Prince Hall Order of the Eastern Star

Supermarkets

Jazz – 1931-1940

Anchorage / Dgheyaytnu (Alaska)

Detailed Description of the Collection

## **B1/F1**

### **Photographs – Richard Watts Sr. and Anna Watts**

.1 – Richard Watts Sr. and Anna Watts [Hand-tinted studio portrait of Richard Watts Sr. and Anna Watts. Photo taken in Philadelphia prior to moving to Alaska, 1940s. Copy print.]

.2 – Watts Zanzibar Bar, West Philadelphia. Richard Watts Sr. Late 1940s [Three Black men on stage at Watts Zanzibar, owned by brothers Richard (on left) and Roberts Watts (on right).]

.3 – L-R: Anna Watts, Richard Watts Sr. [Group photo of four people. Man on far right holding a box may be Slam Stewart, the bassist at Zanzibar.]

.4 – Richard Watts Sr. AK Spotlight column photo. [Studio portrait of Watts Sr. that was published in The Alaska Spotlight, edition unknown.]

.5 – Anchorage 1960's. Front Row L-R: Elmer Burrell, Rose Allen, Willie Du[?], Eula Burrell. Back Row L-R: Willard Bowman, Wilbert Allen, Anna Watts, Richard Watts Sr., Maria Bowman. Photo taken behind Zula Swanson's house. [Group photo between automobiles, log building in background.]

.6 – L-R: Maria Bowman, Eula Burrell, Hazel Lee, Zula Swanson, Anna Watts [Five people posed outside of residence.]

.7 – Zula Swanson, Emerald Green Cadillac [Swanson looking out the window of a parked automobile.]

- .8 – [Three people having a picnic amongst the trees and brush. On the left may be Zula Swanson. There are two people obscured on the right, one might be Anna Watts.]
- .9 – Anna Watts, Richard Watts Sr., Masonic Ball [Anna and Richard seated at a table at a Prince Hall Masonic Ball. Anna is wearing a white gown, gloves, and a corsage. Richard is wearing a tuxedo and an Al Hejaz Temple No. 99 fez.]
- .10 – Northern Lights Civil and Social Club. Anna Watts in back row, second from the end. [Group photo of women wearing formal dresses and corsages, possibly mid-1950s. Front row: third from left may be Eula Burrell; third from right is Dolores Watson Goodman. Back row: second from left is Hazel Lee; on far right may be Flossie Coleman, and second from right is Anna Watts.]
- .11 – Mr. and Mrs. Richard Watts Sr. Charity Ball 1960's [Richard and Anna Watts are seated in the left foreground. Richard is smiling at the camera and resting his face on his hand. Anna is wearing gloves and a dress with rosettes at the neckline. On the back wall is an Anchorage pennant and on the far right is a partial sign, possibly for the NAACP.]
- .12 – Anna Watts going to a charity ball. [Anna wearing a teal, satin dress and standing near an interior door in front of a pink wall.]
- .13 – Anna Watts outside of Dick Watts Import and Export. Anchorage, AK 1964 [Anna standing on a walkway beside the exterior of Watts Dick Co., likely at 1230 East 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.]
- .14 – Mother Eastern Star. Anna Watts. [Anna and another member of the Order of the Eastern Star are seated at a table and wearing crowns. Printed May 1967.]
- .15 – Mother Eastern Star. Anna Watts. [Another member of the Order of the Eastern Star hands a small item to Anna on the right. Both are wearing white outfits, long gloves, and crowns. Printed May 1967.]
- .16 – Anna Watts [Cropped headshot portrait of Anna wearing white and a dark cord at her collar. Possibly an Order of the Eastern Star portrait.]
- .17 – Northern Lights Civil and Social Club [Group photo of club members standing behind a table set with a floral centerpiece. From left to right: ?, Etta Singleton, ?, possibly Charli (Pat) Berkley, Anna Watts, ?, Pearl Caldwell, Flossie Coleman, ?, ?, ?, ?.]
- .18 – Northern Lights Civil and Social Club. Back Row L-R: Anna Watts. Front Row L-R: third from left Dolores Watson, Flossie Coleman, Pearl Caldwell. [from back:] Imperial Professional Photo Service. Anchorage, Alaska. Date 4-19-65 [Group photo of club members. In the back row on the far right is Charli (Pat) Berkley and Etta Singleton may be fourth from right. Front row center is Dolores Watson Goodman.]
- .19 – Masons. Front row L-R: Clarence Coleman, Ray W. Coleman, Herbert J. Turner, Garland J. Harris[?]. Back Row L-R: ?, Richard Watts Sr., ?, ?, John Kilpatrick [Group portrait of the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge membership.]
- .20 – Richard Watts Sr., Gen. Chappie James [Richard shaking the hand of General Daniel "Chappie" James Jr.]
- .21 – Masonic picture [from back:] Richard J. Watts Sr. Imperial Advisor [Formal studio portrait of Richard wearing an Al Hejaz Temple No. 99 Imperial Advisor fez and collar with a pyramid pendant.]
- .22 – Richard Watts Sr., Ray Coleman [Seated portrait of Richard and Ray wearing Mason Aprons and Collars.]

- .23 – Richard Watts Sr., Anchorage Daily News, Civil Rights Activist [Photo of the front page of the ADN featuring Richard and dated February 28, 1982. Photo printed alongside the article taken by Jim Lavrakas.]
- .24 – Richard Watts Sr., 1981, Home Savings and Loan Board of Directors [Cropped headshot photo of Richard, appears to be a photo of an image printed in a newspaper, similar to .23.]
- .25 – 5 10 '96 Richard Watts Sr. 4<sup>th</sup> from left [Group photo of Masons beneath a chandelier in a large room. The Mason wearing the white hat is a top Masonic leader. May 10, 1996.]
- .26 – Richard Watts with one of the top Masonic leaders [Group photo of Masons, Richard with a top leader wearing a white hat at center. May 10, 1996.]

## **B1/F2**

### **Photographs – Richard Watts Jr.**

- .27 – Richard Watts Jr., Cecelia Watts, Holy Family 1957 Confirmation [Siblings Richard and Cecelia dressed in formal clothing and standing on the Holy Family Catholic Church steps.]
- .28 – Richard Watts 1965 Senior pic [Photo of a photo stored in a plastic sleeve. Richard Watts Jr.'s East Anchorage High School senior photo.]
- .29 – Fort Ord 1967 National Guard photo [Formal studio portrait of Richard Watts Jr. in uniform.]
- .30 – Richard Watts, Scarlett Watts, 1984 Carrs Xmas party [Richard and Scarlett in formal dress and posed in front columns decorated with poinsettia garlands at Carrs Christmas party.]
- .31 – Carrs Store Grand Opening 1987 [Richard is attaching a name tag to his suit lapel at the Carrs grand opening event. Behind him is a striped product display.]
- .32 – Fur Rendezvous Fund Raiser 1985 [Richard is standing in an office and holding two corded telephone receivers, one to each ear.]
- .33 – Thomas Watts, Connie Watts, Michael Watts [Studio portrait of Richard Watts Jr.'s children, possibly the mid-1990s?]
- .34 – Richard Watts Jr., Wilma Carr, Larry Carr, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary [Richard with Wilma and Larry Carr between two floral arches. Covered chairs and set tables in background, likely for the Carrs' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration in 2000.]
- .35 – Retirement Party 2017 [Richard Watts Jr. with his Carrs-Safeway retirement glass sculpture award, dated 1967-2017, with inscription "Thank you for you for all your years of dedicated service."]
- .36 – [Photo of a digital image on a smart phone of Richard Watts Jr. Photo printed February 13, 2026, but possibly taken around 2018.]
- .37 – [Richard Watts Jr. with a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority – Alaska Alumnae Chapter at the 2019 Celebration of Black History Month. The sorority member is holding the Alaska Trailblazer Award presented to Mr. Watts on February 16, 2019, for his outstanding contributions to the Anchorage Community.]
- .38 – Richard Watts 2024 [Studio portrait headshot]
- .39 – Carrs Gambell St. Closing 2025 [Partial view of Carrs Quality Center building exterior and empty parking lot.]
- .40 – "To Richard Watts from The Peoples Carrs 1950 – 2025" Closing of Gambell St. Carrs [Photograph of engraved stone that had been used on the Carrs Quality Center building exterior.]

## **B1/F3**

### **Awards, Programs, and Publications**

.41 – NAACP plaque presented to Richard Watts SR. & JR. on February 17, 2002, in recognition for vital service to the Anchorage Community and the Anchorage Branch of the N.A.A.C.P.

[Photo of award]

.42 – Plaque award from the NAACP Anchorage presented to Richard J. Watts Jr. for his Renowned Civic Engagement, September 7, 2019. [Photo of award]

.43 – Juneteenth Anchorage Soul in the Cemetery [Cemetery tour program, June 24, 2023. Program features Richard Sr. and Anna Watts on the cover artwork and highlights a few of their accomplishments on page 6.]

.44 – Alaska’s Black History Makers Ball [Event program, featuring honorees Richard J. Watts Sr. and Jr., February 28, 2026.]

.45 – The Alaska Black Caucus 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Ebony Aurora Awards [Event program, featuring honoree Richard Watts Jr., June 15, 2026.]

.46 – Zanzibar [Single page about Watt’s Zanzibar in West Philadelphia during the 1940s. The page features three images. The lower photo features the owners and brothers, Richard Watts Sr. and Robert Watts Sr.]

.47 – [“Dick ‘Zanzibar’ Watts Tries Luck in Alaska.” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 1949 or 1950. Copy of a newspaper clipping featuring Anna Watts.]

.48 – [Newspaper clipping featuring formal portrait of Richard Watts Sr. wearing a Masonic collar. “Most Worshipful Grand Master of Masons... to establish a Prince Hall F. and A.M., here in Kodiak, State of Alaska, Jurisdiction of Anchorage.” Publication and year unknown.]

– Newspaper articles and clippings, photocopies

– *Alaska Magazine* February 2026 [Spotlight profile. James, David A. “Civil Rights Pioneer: Meet Richard Watts.” *Alaska Magazine*, Feb. 2026, p. 34 and 36.]

Guide written: July – August 2026