

REFERENCE CODE: AkAMH

REPOSITORY NAME:

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Guide prepared by: George Darrow, Volunteer; Heather McClain, Senior Archivist

TITLE: William Robert Mathewson Photograph Collection

COLLECTION NUMBER: B1987.072

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Dates: 1915 - 1922

Extent: 39 items

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): William Robert Mathewson, Henry G. Kaiser, Alaska Engineering Commission, McCain, Sydney Laurence Company, Logemann, P.S. Hunt

Administrative/Biographical History:

William Robert Mathewson worked for the Alaska Engineering Commission / Alaska Railroad as a timekeeper from 1915 to 1923.

Scope and Content Description:

This collection consists of 39 items depicting early construction of the Alaska Railroad. All photographs are black and white.

Arrangement:

Collection arranged by previous archivist, Megan Peacock.

CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS AND USE

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

Physical Access: Original items in good condition.

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

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Preferred Citation:

William Robert Mathewson Photograph Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1987.072

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition and Appraisal Information

Donated by Ruth E. Johnson in September 1987.

Processing Note

Collection processed by ARC Volunteer George Darrow, Winter 2009.

RELATED MATERIALS

B1957.005 Jack H. Floyd Collection
B1961.005 CIHS Collection
B1963.016 Marie Silverman Collection
B1963.x.005 CIHS Gastrock Collection
B1964.001 John Urban Collection
B1964.x.002 Anna M. Crutcher Collection
B1965.003 Fred B. Wood Collection
B1965.018 Fred Henton Collection
B1967.019 CIHS Isaacs
B1970.019 J.J. Delaney Collection
B1970.x.002 Railroad Photograph Collection
B1971.025 Halverson Collection
B1975.134 CIHS Collection
B1977.005 Dr. Romig Photograph Collection
B1977.147 ARR Sutton Collection
B1979.001 AHFAM FIC Collection
B1980.041 Dorothy Stauter Collection
B1981.019 AHFAM FIC Collection
B1981.036 Early Alaska Photograph Collection
B1982.099 Edna Moyer Williams Photograph Collection
B1984.081 Robert Culver Collection
BL1985.063 Romig Collection
B1987.072 William Robert Mathewson Collection

B1988.052 A.R. Sessions Collection
B1989.016 Lu Liston Collection
B1994.002 Wennerstrom Collection
B1999.022 Morgan Sherwood Alaska Railroad Photographs
B2008.015 Cornelia Templeton Jewett Hatcher Papers
B2011.014 Lane Family Photograph Collection
B2013.007 Marcus V. Tyler Album
B2013.013 Alaska Railroad Week Posters
B2013.015 Alaska Railroad Equipment Photographs
B2013.049 Katherine G. Kane Manuscript, My Twenty Seven Years in Alaska and the Aleutians
B2015.016 W.L. McCulloch Alaska Railroad Collection
B2015.031 Alaska Railroad Denali Park Slides
B2017.032 Arturo Lloyd Alaska Railroad Photographs
B2017.033 Dudley Westler Alaska Railroad Slides
B2019.001 Guy Wheeler Alaska Railroad Collection
B2019.015 Alaska Railroad Slides
B2020.005 Alaska Railroad Ephemera Collection
B2023.003 John Elder, Jr. Slides
B2024.003 James T. Wilson Collection
1966.039
1968.009
1970.082
1973.101.001 Plaque
1982.038
1984.019.001 "Sixty Years of Alaska Railroading," Steve Hillyer
1991.011.001-.002 Train depot benches
1993.065
1998.021
2007.041
Records of The Alaska Railroad (Record Group 322), National Archives and Records Administration
RG226 Alaska Railroad Corporation, Alaska State Archives

SUBJECTS

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

Detailed Description of the Collection

Folder 1

- .1 – postcard. Photographer: Nokeo (?) 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.”)
- .2 – postcard. Photographer: McCain. Anchorage Oct. 14 1916. Anchorage, Alaska.
- .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, 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 – 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.
- .7 – postcard. Harbor at Anchorage, Alaska. 1915. SS Alameda and SS _____ (freighter). SS _____ auxiliary sloop – freighter also local sternwheeler. “Matanuska.”
- .8 – postcard. Photographer: Noko (?) Dec. 1922. Anchorage – foot of 4th Ave. Cook’s Inlet – frozen ice drifts with tide – looking North. (Photograph shows three buildings in the foreground with ice-covered Cook Inlet behind them.)
- .9 – postcard. Obst (?) Office 4th Ave. Anchorage Alaska.
- .10 – Anchorage, Alaska.
- .11 – postcard. Photographer: The S.L. Co. (Sydney Laurence?) Early morning in the Yards. Anchorage – 1920. (Photo shows a rail-mounted construction crane.)
- .12 – postcard. Photographer: The S.L. Co. (Sydney Laurence?) Like the Ant and the Grain of Corn. April 1916. Laying a spur in the yards about April 1st. Our new building in the background to the left. May 1 – 1916. (Photo shows men laying track in the Ship Creek yards of the Alaska Railroad.)

.13 – 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 in charge 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; #15 -?; #16 Art Hewitt; #17 George Voss (Harbormaster); #18 Walter DeLong – later... Gen'l Storekeeper – my only boss plus "Harbormaster" first several months; #19 Bill Manning – Foreman of outside material yard stock; #20 Where is Howard Gardner not in photo...? In toilet? He was with our 31st Regiment in France {steel beams etc oil drums gasoline etc.}; #21; #22. 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 tide. 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 Railroad also member of the 31st Ry regiment in France – WW#1 1918 -1919 Co. D.

.14 – Boys Race, Recreation Park, Anchorage July 4th 1916. Photographer: The Sydney Laurence CO. (the note over the shack reads: "see note on other side"). (Written on the back): The small black tarpaper cover'd one-room cabin was lined inside with a 8' x 10' tent and quite cozy with two bunks plus a sheet metal Yukon stove and we baked hot biscuits & hotcakes in the small oven. WRM. 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.

.15 – A.E.C. Baseball Team – Tri League Anchorage, Alaska. June 20th, 1920. W.G. Wilt, Manager. (The man on front row – right is marked R.R. Engineer.). (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, Balhiser. 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 scattered 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.

.16 – A.E.C. Ball-Team “Pennant Winners” – Anchorage, Alaska. 1921. Photographer: Logemann. 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 shortstop, ? Mascot, Wilford Stump fielder.

.17 – three of Anchorage’s Baseball teams 1922. Photographer. Geo L. Johnson. 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.

.18 – Government Hospital Anchorage. Alaska Engineering Commission Anchorage Alaska Jan. 30, 1916. AEC ’43. (Photo shows buildings at the mouth of Ship Creek.) Photographer: Sydney Laurence.

.19 – Stock of bridge ties. Mar. 1-17, A.E.C. Ry. Anchorage, Alaska. A.E.C. G333. Photographer: P.S. Hunt.

.20 – A.E.C G1230. Anchorage & Chickaloon Mixed Train at Matanuska Junction. “April 14-1919.” (Photo shows caboose no. 1010) Photographer: H.G. Kaiser.

.21 – Cottage No. 14. A.E.C. Photo No. G-1240. Photographer: H.G. Kaiser. (Photographer shows a cottage with an unidentified man and woman sitting on the front porch and holding two babies. The house has storm windows installed.)

.22 – Cottage No. 15. A.E.C. Photo No. G-1241. Photographer: H.G. Kaiser.

.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.)

.24 – A.E.C. G-1253. Matanuska Water Tank. April 14-1919. Photographer: H.G. Kaiser. (Photo 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

.26 – Rotary Plough on way to snow-slide at Mile 49.4. Apr 12-1921. A.E.C. G-1744. Photographer: H.G. Kaiser. I was timekeeper and principal clerk in the Superintendent office. Halfway between Seward to Anchorage. One the Alaska Railroad.

.27 – Gov’t Saw Mill. Camp 245. Nov. 8th, 1916. Dead Horse Camp.

.28 – Gov’t Warehouse Camp 245. Nov. 1916.

.29 – Bennett House Camp 245. Nov. 8th, 1916.

.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 smoothed 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 the Yukon River at the Susitna River when not frozen. W.R. Mathewson. J.T. Cunningham, Supt.

.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.

.38 – postcard. Wintertime Seward Alaska. Addressed to: Mr. & Mrs. W.R. Mathewson Box 1835. Anchorage Alaska. 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.

.39 – [Restricted because of sensitive content]

Guide written: January 2, 2026