



Restoring Context to the John E. Thwaites Photographs of Alaska

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Background

John E. Thwaites documented Alaska from 1907-1932 while serving as a mail clerk along the Alaskan Peninsula and Inside Passage, and later when settled in Ketchikan. His photographs depict Native life, maritime and industrial history, and coastal communities.

Several decades ago, the collection was broken into subject files, stripping away the context. Despite several attempts to process it, the collection has been inaccessible to the public for years.



Process



After determining that Thwaites' own numbering system did not reflect original order, several steps were identified:

- Creating an intellectual arrangement that better facilitates research and interpretation of the collection
- Integrating materials from other collections
- Devising a new and clear numbering system
- Writing and encoding a finding aid
- Digitizing the images for online access

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Impact

The dismantled state of this collection has made it inaccessible to the public for decades. By finally being appropriately processed, it may be used by researchers as well as accessed digitally.

A more comprehensive intellectual arrangement will dramatically increase the research value of the collection by revealing the greater context of each photograph. The collection holds significance for researchers studying many aspects of Alaskan history, and it will now allow for greater insight when experienced as an integrated whole rather than as unrelated parts.

