

**Alaska State Library
Historical Collections**

Guide to Collection

Coffey, Robert

Robert Coffey Alaska Highway Construction Photo Album, 1943

PCA 525-10

2 Folders
1 Album with 123 b&w photos
1 CD with 5 photos
1 Engineer's report
1 Map

Processed by: Alea Oien, 6/2009
Anastasia Tarmann

ACQUISITION: The collection was donated by Sharon Ann Gold, granddaughter of Robert Coffey, to the Alaska State Library Historical Collections and is accessioned as 2003-41.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

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PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the folder level. All items have been placed into pH-neutral folders.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

By Elaine Coffey Beckman (Oldest child of Robert & Elva Coffey)

Robert Coffey (8/15/1895 – 3/8/1974) was a Chief Engineering Aid in the Alaska-Canada Highway Construction project in the 1940's.

He was born in Ellettsville, Monroe, Indiana. He graduated from the 8th grade and was hired as an apprentice surveyor for the Union Pacific Railroad. He was sent to Denver and southern Colorado area, near Deertail, Agate and Granada Colorado.

He met his wife in 1916 and then World War I started and he enlisted in the Army and was sent to New York and then to France. He was in France 6 months with the 327th Field Artillery Company, Survey Gunnery Company D, Bordeaux, France.

Robert returned to Colorado and the Union Pacific Railroad. He married Elva Mae Hutchens Oct. 6, 1919. He moved his family to Pueblo, Colorado and went to work for the Colorado State Highway Dept. as an Engineer/Surveyor until 1924.

He moved his family to Denver and went to work for the Bureau of Public Roads, later known as the Public Roads Administration. He would leave at Easter time and be gone until mid-October on road projects all over the Colorado area, living in summer camps.

In 1928 he was sent to Cody, Wyoming to start the Federal Highway into Yellowstone National Park. He drove a Ford touring car with his instruments in the trunk and side compartments.

His family often spent their summer vacations near his working camps, living in tents with wooden floors.

In 1930 to 1940 Robert worked in the Rocky Mountain National Park areas. He was Engineer and Chief Surveyor for the Trail Ridge Fall River Pass Highway over the Continental Divide from Estes Park to Grand Lake, Colorado. (His papers and photos from this job are now in the Estes Park Area Historical Museum). He lived in Estes Park for two years and in the summer he stayed in Hidden Valley Camp. He was an engineer on the Berthoud Pass Road, Big Thompson Canyon, and Vail, Colorado projects.

In 1942 & 1943 he was sent to Alaska on the now famous Al-Can highway. He had his camps near Whitehorse, Dawson and Ft. Nelson. During the summer thaw the peat areas would cover over the highway. Large road equipment, cars and tools would sink in it like quick sand and disappear under the "thaw". This section of the road was rebuilt many times. His family spent the summers with him on the highway. Each winter he would return to Denver.

In 1944 to 1946 he was sent to Mesa Verde National Park. In 1948 Robert was sent to Santa Fe, New Mexico with the Southern Division of Public Roads Administration. Indian project roads [sic] to the reservations became State Highways [at that time].

In 1951 Robert was sent to Alpine, Texas on the Big Bend National Park until 1953, and then back to Santa Fe, New Mexico until late in 1954, when he was sent to the project Pan-American Highway into old Mexico.

In 1964 Robert and his wife returned to Denver to live. That summer he was sent to Yellowstone National Park to do the "Circle 8" project road up to Yellowstone Falls and Jackson Hole in the Teton Range.

In 1965 he traveled back to Alaska to re-survey some of the trouble spots as consulting engineer/surveyor. Robert retired in 1965 after 37 years of roadwork for the Federal Government and a rating of GSE DF19.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

This collection contains a leather bound photograph album with photographs covering the construction of the Alaska-Canada Highway in 1943. The photos are from Section "E", Fort St. John to Fort Nelson, British Columbia, Canada. There is a final engineering report by Robert Coffey for that section of road. There is a map showing the Alaska Highway and river drainages from Dawson Creek, British Columbia to Fairbanks, Alaska. There is one biography of Robert Coffey written by his oldest daughter and a CD with photos of Robert Coffey, a scanned image of a certificate, a letter and a Selective Service release to go to Canada.

SUBJECTS

Alaska-Canada Highway, Fort St. John, Ft. Nelson, British Columbia

INVENTORY

Folder 1 of 2

Alaska Highway Engineer's Report with photos by Robert Coffey

Map showing the Alaska Highway and river drainages from Dawson Creek, British Columbia to Fairbanks, Alaska

CD with photos of Robert Coffey, a scanned image of a certificate, a letter and a Selective Service release to go to Canada

Biography of Robert Coffey

Folder 2 of 2

Leather bound photograph album with 123 black and white photos of various size regarding Robert Coffey's work on the Alaska Highway.