

**REFERENCE CODE:** AkAMH

**REPOSITORY NAME:**

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Guide prepared by: Elizabeth Sikora, Research Center Intern

**TITLE:** Zula Swanson Photographs

**COLLECTION NUMBER:** B1977.104

**OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION**

Dates: circa 1950

Extent: 1 folder, 2 photographs

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): Unknown

**Administrative/Biographical History:**

Zula Swanson (1891–1973) was born on a cotton plantation in Jackson Gap, Alabama in 1891. In 1918, she moved to Portland, Oregon, where she worked as a dressmaker, and where she married shortly after arriving. The marriage did not last, and, with limited financial resources, Zula became a sex worker and managed to amass a large savings. In 1929 she relocated to Anchorage, Alaska to escape charges of bootlegging and drunk driving.

Swanson realized the financial opportunities of her profession in Anchorage and purchased property downtown, which she turned into a brothel disguised as a boardinghouse. She also owned the Rendezvous Hotel, which served as a meeting place for new arrivals seeking housing and job opportunities.

Swanson continued to prosper in Anchorage, purchasing commercial and residential lots throughout the 1940s and 1950s, quickly becoming one of the largest landowners in the state. In 1962, she sold one of her downtown lots, reportedly worth as much as \$250,000 (roughly \$2. million in 2022), to developers who built J.C. Penney, which is operational in 2022.

While growing her businesses, Swanson maintained an active role in civic life in Anchorage. She was one of the founding members of the Anchorage chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1951, and was a member of various community clubs, including the Daughters of the Elks and the Northern Lights Civic and Social Club. She owned her dream home on Goose Lake near the University of Alaska Anchorage. Swanson passed in Anchorage in January 1973, at the age of 82.

**Scope and Content Description:**

This collection consists of two black and white photographs of Zula Swanson in an interior setting.

**Arrangement:**

Original order maintained.

**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:**

Zula Swanson Photographs, Anchorage Museum, B1977.104

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Acquisition and Appraisal Information**

Donated by Blanche McSmith in 1977.

**RELATED MATERIALS**

Vertical Files, Blacks in Alaska

**SUBJECTS**

Swanson, Zula (1891-1973)

Anchorage (Alaska)

## Detailed Description of the Collection

F1

.001 – Zula Swanson. 35mm slide, 4x5 copy neg. [One Black woman sitting on a radiator with her legs and hands crossed]

.002 – Zula Swanson. 4x5 copy neg. [One Black woman posing by the piano]

Guide written: January 27, 2022