

**REFERENCE CODE:** AkAMH

**REPOSITORY NAME:**

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center  
Atwood Resource Center  
625 C Street  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Phone: 907-929-9235  
Fax: 907-929-9233  
Email: [resourcecenter@anchagemuseum.org](mailto:resourcecenter@anchagemuseum.org)

Guide prepared by: Elizabeth Sikora, Research Center Intern

**TITLE:** Bessie Kendall Couture Collection

**COLLECTION NUMBER:** B1987.002

**OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION**

Dates: circa 1900

Extent: 1 folder, 48 photographs

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): Unknown

**Administrative/Biographical History:**

Bessie Kendall Couture was the owner and operator of two restaurants, the Black and White Restaurant and the Broadway Restaurant and Bakery, in Skagway, Alaska. Her first restaurant in Skagway is thought to be the first black-owned business in Alaska, operating 1886-1900 during the height of the Klondike Gold Rush began. She opened her second restaurant in the 1920s with her third husband, William Couture.

Not much is known about Kendall Couture. We do know she was married at least three times. The first marriage ending in divorce and the second marriage, to a man named A.W. Kendall, ending in tragedy with his death in the shipwreck of *The Princess Sophia* in 1918. She married William Couture in 1920 in Skagway where they both worked as cooks. In her later years, Kendall Couture divided her time between Alaska and Seattle, spending winters in the Lower 48. According to the Skagway census of 1930 and 1940, Bessie was the head of household and owner of her home.

This collection of photographs was found by the donor, Mary Ellen Schesser, in her mother's basement. According to the donor, her grandmother, Anne Woods, met and befriended Couture onboard a ship travelling to Alaska, and they stayed in touch.

**Scope and Content Description:**

This collection consists of 48 black and white photographs of multiple locations including Unalaska, Nome, Anvil Creek, Skagway, and Tee Harbor. There are also five miniature portraits of Bessie Kendall Couture. Photographs in Nome are dated as 1900 and include images of September 1900 storm that caused significant damage.

**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:**

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:**

Bessie Kendall Couture Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1987.2

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Acquisition and Appraisal Information**

Donated by Mary Ellen Schesser in January 1987.

**RELATED MATERIALS**

Vertical File, Black Lives in Alaska

**SUBJECTS**

Couture, Bessie Kendall  
African Americans – Alaska  
Anvil Creek (Alaska)  
Nome (Alaska)

Nome Region (Alaska)—Gold discoveries  
Snake River (Alaska)  
Skagway (Alaska)  
Tee Harbor (Alaska)  
Unalaska (Alaska)  
Dutch Harbor (Alaska)  
Seattle (Washington)

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Folder 1

- .1 – 2 [view of a building on a beach outside of Alaska]
- .2 – Seattle. 3, owly? [street view in Seattle, Washington with a statue in the crossroad. Lettering on awning of building at right reads, “Doctors K and K. Pacific Shirt, Goods Sold at Factory”]
- .3 – [A group of men loading or unloading a horse at a dock. Mountains in the background]
- .4 – East of Nome. 5 [a group of people in two boats sitting in water. Shoreline with structures in background]
- .5 – 4x5 copy neg. 1 [people on shore with boats resting on beach and one in the water. Buildings line the beach with a Russian Orthodox church at the back, possibly the Holy Ascension Russian Orthodox Church in Unalaska. Mountains with snow in the background]
- .6 – Unalaska (Coming into Dutch Harbor from Sand Spit) [people in three boats possibly heading to shore. At least three ships at anchor. Buildings along the shoreline and mountains with snow in the background]
- .7 – Dutch Harbour in 1900. 2 [Holy Ascension Russian Orthodox Church in Unalaska. Buildings in the background with American flag on flagpole. Mountains with snow in the background]
- .8 – [five cannons and an upside down boat below a flagpole. Likely Unalaska]
- .9 – [people on deck and at railing of the *Humboldt*. Possibly setting sail. Ship and mountains in background]
- .10 – 2 [view of ice flows in water]
- .11 – 1 [a group of people on deck of a ship. Lettering on stern reads, “Thrasme?”]
- .12 - 1 [view of two ships in water possibly anchored]
- .13 – 4x5 copy neg. 3 [subterranean house surrounded by railing with uncovered kayak at right and clothes on a line drying. Surrounded by other buildings. Wooden barrel and tub visible in foreground. Mountains with snow in the background]
- .14 – Mouth of Nome River. 3 [A boat in water in foreground. At least two horses on bridge, two people at right end of bridge with structures in the background]
- .15 – Nome River. Belmont Point [view of buildings and tents along shoreline. Hills and mountains in the background. Possibly boats in foreground]
- .16 – 8 [view of beach with two people walking and at least one boat in water and several others pulled up on shore. Possibly tents and structures at right]
- .17 – 1 [street view with people standing and walking. Likely Nome. American flags are hung outside of building and storefronts, and along a line that crosses the street. Signs left to right]

read, "Outfits Bought and Sold, Highest Price Paid, Auld and Thorburn?," "Barber Shop and Baths," "New York Laundry," and "Tony Tubbs Hotel"]

.18 – 1 [Two boats on the beach in the foreground, numerous ships in the background]

.19 – 5 [one man in a boat on water. Boats tied off in the foreground. Buildings on opposite side of water with a sign in the background on building that reads "Saloon." Likely Nome]

.20 – [two men in a boat on water with three people on shore to the left and boats anchored by the shore with ships visible in the background]

.21 – 4x5 copy neg. 5? [street view in Nome with people sitting and walking along the side. Horses and mules pulling wagons and carts. Building on left, man on a ladder resting on side of the building. Sign on building at center reads, "Gold Belt Dance Hall"]

.22 – 5 [group of men on a barge offloading boxes on to a beach. Ship visible in the background. Likely Nome]

.23 – 4x5 copy neg. 4 [one Indigenous man walking with a dog on beach with tents and people sitting on the ground. Likely Nome]

.24 – 3 [Street view of Nome with people on the boardwalk and street. Horse with cart at right. American flags and decorations hanging on many of the buildings. Signs on buildings left to right read, "The Warwick," "The Dexter," "The Hunter," "Ticket Office, Up Stairs," "North [star] Restaurant," "Palace Restaurant," "JR Rudd and Co.," "Lumbe[r]," and "Freightline, Anywhere & Every[where], Hanna & B"]

.25 – 5 [two women and two men in possibly a lumberyard with a building at right. Likely Nome]

.26 – Snake River. 1 [Nome waterfront view with people in boats and barges. Buildings, structures and docks on either side of the shore. Possibly a river boat in background]

.27 – 5 [a group of people sitting and standing next to an umiak on shore in Nome. Tents and buildings in the background]

.28 – [building flooded and collapsing in water with signs that read "The Baltimore House" and "The Baltimore House, Beds 50cents, Rooms \$1?" Four people at right in front of building with sign that reads, "C.F. Matthews, Dentist" Boat in foreground and other buildings visible in the background. Damage likely caused by September 1900 storm]

.29 – [people standing on shore next to damaged buildings and tents. Sign on building at right reads, "Private Hospital." Damage likely caused by September 1900 storm in Nome]

.30 – 1 [group of people on ship arriving by boat at a beachfront. Possibly related to damage caused by September 1900 storm in Nome]

.31 – [groups of men standing in front of and next to building with American flag banners. Signs read, "Builders Office: Madden House," "Theatre Under Management of Blei & Spitzel, Seattle and Cape Nome Opera Co. Prop's," "The Columbia Programme," "A New York Co. of 30 Artists, Columbia Theatre Tonight"]

.32 – 4 [waves crashing with damage and debris on shoreline. Damage likely caused by September 1900 storm in Nome]

.33 – Wreck of Skookum mid photo. 3 [different view of "The Baltimore House" being flooded at right. Damage likely caused by September 1900 storm in Nome. Similar to .28]

.34 – 4x5 copy neg. 7 [five Indigenous children standing next to and sitting in umiak with one man at right. Buildings and boat visible in background]

- .35 – Anvil Rock. 7 [view of hill with rocks at the top]
- .36 – Near the mouth of Anvil Creek, Discovery Claim [view of active mining claim with men shoveling and building a sluice. Tents at left and center in background]
- .37 – Anvil Creek, Discovery Claim. 3 [view of people building sluices with tents in the background]
- .38 – 1 [three women and a child with buckets next to a river. Possibly a cow grazing on hillside on opposite shore]
- .39 – x [a girl with a scarf or wrap over her head. Building and fence in the background with possible litter on the ground]
- .40 – 5 [one man holding a child, one woman and second man in the water on a beach. Boats, tents, and buildings visible in the background at left. Likely Nome]
- .41 – 3 [two cows grazing at shore of river. Group of people on opposite shoreline with bridge and buildings in the background. Possibly Anvil Creek]
- .42 – Mt. Dewey at Skagway. Trapeze artist ca. 1898-9 [street view of people watching the trapeze artist at the center]
- .43 – William at Tee Harbor Alaska. x [three men posing in front of a building, man on the left with a rifle, man at center with butcher knives, and man on right with teacups. William may be William Couture]
- .44a-e – [five miniature portraits of Bessie Kendall Couture]

Guide written: January 28, 2022