

**REFERENCE CODE:** AkAMH

**REPOSITORY NAME:**

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**TITLE:** CIHS McCutcheon

**COLLECTION NUMBER:** B1964.x.6

**OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION**

Dates: 1964

Extent: 4 folders, 1 folder

Language and Scripts: English

Name of creator(s): Steve McCutcheon

**Administrative/Biographical History:**

Stephen Douglas McCutcheon was born in the small town of Cordova, AK, in 1911, just three years after the first city lots were sold at auction. In 1915, the family relocated to Anchorage, which was then just a tent city thrown up to house workers on the Alaska Railroad. McCutcheon began taking photographs as a young boy, but it wasn't until he found himself in the small town of Curry, AK, working as a night roundhouse foreman for the railroad that he set out to teach himself the art and science of photography. As a Deputy U.S. Marshall in Valdez in 1940-1941, McCutcheon honed his skills as an evidential photographer; as assistant commissioner in the state's new Dept. of Labor, McCutcheon documented the cannery industry in Unalaska. From 1942 to 1944, he worked as district manager for the federal Office of Price Administration in Fairbanks, taking photographs of trading stations, communities and residents of northern Alaska; he sent an album of these photos to Washington, D.C., "to show them," he said, "that things that applied in the South 48 didn't necessarily apply to Alaska."

The 1964 Alaska Earthquake or Good Friday Earthquake occurred on March 27, 1964 at 5:36 PM AST. The quake lasted for five minutes with a magnitude of 9.2. Across south-central Alaska, ground fissures, collapsing buildings, and tsunamis directly caused about 131 deaths. Most property damage occurred in Anchorage, 75 mi northwest of the epicenter. Anchorage

was not hit by tsunamis, but downtown Anchorage was heavily damaged and parts of the city built on sandy bluffs near Cook Inlet, most notably the Turnagain neighborhood, suffered landslide damage. Land overlooking the Ship Creek valley near the Alaska Railroad yards also slid, destroying many acres of buildings and city blocks in downtown Anchorage. Most other areas of the city were only moderately damaged.

McCutcheon was drafted into the Army in July 1944 and received an assignment as a combat photographer for the 14th Signal Service Company. His military service was short: in January 1946, he was elected to fill the territorial Senate seat vacated by the death of his father, Herbert. That same year, he started his first business, Mac's Foto, developing film, producing prints, and selling photography supplies. Soon, he branched out into commercial photography. Obtaining a private pilot's license in 1949, McCutcheon took annual aerial shots of Anchorage; a hunting guide license allowed him to work with hunters shooting films of backcountry expeditions. His stock photographs of the local flora and fauna, geological features, glaciers, and other natural features, as well as Alaska Native culture, earned him an international reputation.

McCutcheon retired from electoral politics in 1953, but was elected one of seven delegates-at-large to the Alaska Constitutional Convention in 1955. While chairing the committee on the legislature, he compiled what remains the most complete photographic record of the Convention in existence.

The Good Friday Earthquake of 1964 destroyed McCutcheon's photo shop but provided a boon in jobs to document damage for insurance purposes. Between customer contracts and his own desire to capture the event, he created a huge catalog of images of the destruction. He and printer Steve Hafling partnered on a small book, *Alaskan Earthquake Pictorial*, which sold 20,000 copies.

In 1970, McCutcheon was again at the center of history in the making, when he became the first official photographer for the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, builders of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. Over the course of seven years he took more than 30,000 photographs, capturing the lives of pipeline workers as well as the technical aspects of this major engineering achievement.

Throughout his multifaceted career, McCutcheon "used his camera to record the history he was helping to make."<sup>2</sup> He captured the history of Alaska during a time when few gave any thought to the epic transformations going on around them. In the process, he documented lives lived on a rugged frontier, a meeting of cultures, the building of a civilization, the triumphant development of natural resources, and the changing landscape of a northern region impacted by climate change. In McCutcheon's photographs are lessons for any who would study the history of America's pioneering spirit, the traditions and accommodations of Alaska Native peoples, the history of technology in extreme climates, the dominance of oil in modern society, or the effects of climate on man and nature.

Scope and Content Description:

This collection consists of four photos of the Central Business District after the Earthquake of 1964. The subjects of the photographs are the Cordova Building, the J.C. Penny Building, and Mac's Photo Shop. The collection is housed in the photo file collection. Please see photo list for specific photograph information.

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.

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Preferred Citation:

CIHS McCutcheon, Anchorage Museum, B1964.x.6

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

Acquisition and Appraisal Information

Donated to the Cook Inlet Historical Society by Steve McCutcheon.

**RELATED MATERIALS**

B1990.014 Steve McCutcheon Collection

B2003.011 McCutcheon Prints

**SUBJECTS**

Detailed Description of the Collection

- .1 – Cordova Bldg. Rehabilitated after 1964 earthquake of 27 March 1964.
- .2 – J.C. Penny Building, 27 March 1964
- .3 – Mac's Photo Shop, "Closed due to early breakup."
- .4 – Earthquake damaged column in the Cordova Bldg.

Guide written: January 6, 2025