

# BLACK HISTORY IN THE STATE OF ALASKA

By Lisa Murkowski



Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans in U.S. history. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Here is a list of some individuals who made a lasting impact on our state.



## Thomas S. Bevers

Arriving in Anchorage in 1921, Thomas "Tom" Bevers was the first paid firefighter in the Volunteer Fire Department, later serving as Chief of the City of Anchorage Fire Department and city councilman. He was deeply involved in Anchorage's physical development and also played a major role in creating the annual Fur Rendezvous winter festival which continues to this day.

## Leonard Larkins and "Unnamed Soldiers" working on the Alaska Highway during WWII

In 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized a highway connecting Dawson Creek, British Columbia and Delta Junction. Leonard Larkins and nearly 4,000 other segregated black soldiers helped build a highway across Alaska and Canada during WWII.



## Bessie M. Couture

During the gold rush, she opened the Black and White restaurant in Skagway in 1896. It was the first Alaska business owned by an African American.



## Captain Michael A. Healy

A legend in the U.S. Coast Guard, not just for being the first African-American officer, but for his involvement enforcing federal law along Alaska's coastline as the Commanding Officer of the Revenue Cutter Bear from 1887-1895.

## Blanche McSmith

In 1959, she became the first black representative in the Alaska State Legislature. She helped organize the Anchorage Branch of the NAACP and was known for her work for social and economic justice in Alaska.

