

Collection #
P 0909

**JEAN AND CHARLES THOMAS
COLLECTION, 1911-1998**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: Three photograph albums, one half-sized box of photographs.

COLLECTION DATES: 1911-1998

PROVENANCE: Ken Langell for Noah Springer, 2011

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Thomas H. Ridley oral history interview (SC3589)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2012.0004

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jean Thomas was born Ethel Jean Ransom in Columbus, Ohio on 24 February 1916. Her mother Bessie [Day] Ransom was a homemaker and former hairdresser, and her father Herbert Ransom was a postal clerk. She also had an older sister, Mary.

At the age of 20, Jean married her sweetheart, Charles J. Thomas, on Christmas Eve 1936. Charles was also from Columbus but had recently taken a job teaching Industrial Arts at a public school in Indianapolis, and the couple relocated there. In 1942 they moved to a house at 304 W. 39th Street in Indianapolis, which they would call home for many years. They hosted friends and family at the house, and even the Deep River Boys, a nationally known singing group.

In the summer of 1943, Charles enlisted in the Army. He received training at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis and then at Aberdeen, Maryland. To stay close to her husband, Jean got a job selling cigars at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds exchange branch and lived at the local service club for a couple of months. After being transferred to Camp Young in California, Charles was promoted to Technician fifth grade.

Charles arrived in England in March of 1944. From there he went to France as a supply sergeant, and then to Belgium as part of the Third Army in January 1945. In February he entered Germany. While there, Charles received a Certificate of Merit as a part of the 444th Quartermaster Truck Company. He later toured the grisly remains of a liberated concentration camp. He finished his service with five battle stars.

Though the war ended in early May, Charles did not receive his discharge until December of 1945. However, he made it home in time for his ninth wedding anniversary.

After the war, Charles resumed his work teaching Industrial Arts in Indianapolis. Around 1949 he earned a masters' degree from Butler University. Over his 43-year career he taught at Schools 4, 17, 19, 56, 63, 64, and Shortridge High School. Jean resumed proudly hosting guests at their home on 39th Street. Both Charles and Jean were active members of the NAACP, Alpha Phi Alpha, and St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

Charles J. Thomas passed away on 26 November 1989. Jean remained in Indianapolis until her death on 19 July 2002.

Sources:

"Charles J. Thomas services Thursday," *Indianapolis News*, 27 November 1989

"Ethel Jean Ransom Thomas," *Indianapolis Star*, 24 July 2002

Materials in collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of visual materials from Jean Ransom Thomas, her family, and her husband Charles J. Thomas. Of primary importance is the scrapbook she kept while Charles was in the Army during World War II. It contains postcards he sent home, photographs, official documents, and other ephemera, with Jean's written details about her experience as a civilian with a spouse overseas.

The Ransom (no known relation to Mme. Walker's attorney Freeman B. Ransom) family album begins during Jean's early childhood but mostly consists of her own photographs as an adult. There are a number of images of Jean and Charles' home at 304 W. 39th Street in Indianapolis, both interior and exterior. The home had a distinctive house number sign hanging over the front steps, and it seems to have become her custom to photograph their visitors standing below the sign. Many family members from both sides of the family are represented in the album throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Later color photographs from the 1980s and 1990s appear to be from James H. "Jimmy" Thomas, son of Charles' brother Julius Harold Thomas.

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Herbert and Bessie [Day] Ransom, circa 1911

Ransom family photograph album [loose pages], circa 1920-1949

Loose photographs from family album, 1920s-1930s

Jean and Charles J. Thomas, 1939-circa 1943

Herbert and Bessie [Day] Ransom family, Sept. 1939

Jean and Charles Thomas trip to Niagara Falls, New York City, July 1940

Bessie [Day] Ransom, 1930s-1940s

Family Christmas dinner [hand-colored], 1941

Charles J. Thomas WWII scrapbook kept by Jean Thomas, 1943-1945

Charles J. Thomas dress uniform portrait, circa 1943

Loose photographs from family album, 1940s

Alpha Phi Alpha wives, 1952; 1953

Jean [Ransom] Thomas, circa 1961

Charles J. Thomas, circa 1965

Jean and Charles with tour group in Central America, 1978

CONTAINER

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 1

Album Storage:
PAC

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 3

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 4

Album Storage:
PAA

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 5

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 6

Album Storage:
PAC

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 7

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 8

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 10

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 11

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 12

Jean and Charles Thomas with Harold, Jimmy
Thomas, 1986

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 13

Harold Thomas, Jimmy Thomas, 1986-1990

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 14

Jean [Ransom] Thomas, 1980s; 1993; 1998

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 15

Jean and family on the day of Charles' funeral, 30
Nov. 1989

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 16

Unidentified and misc.

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 17