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Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Fred Thomas papers**

1931-1998

SC MG 696

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2015.

## Summary

**Creator:** Thomas, Fred, -2001

**Title:** Fred Thomas papers

**Date:** 1931-1998

**Size:** 9 linear feet (19 boxes, 5 volumes)

**Source:** Donated by the Estate of Fred Thomas, 2001.

**Abstract:** Fred Thomas ( - 2001) was a baritone vocalist. In addition to performing, he was active in the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), serving as the association's treasurer for many years. The Fred Thomas papers, dating from 1931 to 1998, consist primarily of the records Thomas accumulated as treasurer of NANM. They also hold scrapbooks, letters, programs, clippings, and photographs documenting the singer's performance career; and the papers of Alfred Howe, a friend of Thomas's.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2015.

## Creator History

Frederick Logan Thomas ( - 2001), a baritone vocalist, was born in Good Hope, Georgia, and raised in Norristown, Pennsylvania. He attended the State Teachers College in Cheyney (now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania) before he received a scholarship to study voice at the Mannes College of Music in New York City. Thomas's vocal teachers included John Lester, Ettore Verna, and Grant

Garnell.

Thomas was drafted during World War II and served in Europe, where he gave concerts. After returning to the United States, he trained at the American Theatre Wing. Thomas toured the country with Leonard De Paur's Infantry Chorus; performed with the Janet Collins Dance Theatre Company; and appeared with the New York City Opera, the New York Opera Theatre Company, the Harlem Opera Society, and the Community Opera Company.

On Broadway, Thomas was a member of the companies of *Show Boat* (1946) and *Caribbean Carnival* (1947); he also appeared in regional theater or opera productions of *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Call Me Mister*, *Finian's Rainbow*, *Carmen Jones*, and *Cousin Esther*. His television and radio appearances included such shows as Arthur Godfrey's *Talent Scouts* and Tommy Tucker's *Sing for Your Supper*. In 1951, Thomas made his recital debut at Town Hall, and he performed there several more times during his career. That same year, he was a winner of the *Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air* radio competition (he was the first African American to win), and made his debut at Carnegie Hall.

Thomas performed a recital at Alice Tully Hall in 1971 in celebration of the 20th anniversary of his debut. The National Opera Association awarded Thomas its legacy award in 1998, recognizing him for his role in widening opportunities for black artists in American opera houses.

As his career progressed, Thomas became active with Mu Te Or, the Brooklyn chapter of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), and served as treasurer of the national organization for many years. He was also a member of the New York Singing Teachers' Association, and taught private students. An active member of St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Manhattan, Thomas performed as a soloist at various churches throughout his career. Fred Thomas died in New York City in 2001.

## Scope and Content Note

The Fred Thomas papers, dating from 1931 to 1998, consist primarily of the records Thomas accumulated as treasurer of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM). They also hold scrapbooks, letters, programs, and photographs documenting the singer's performance career; and the papers of Alfred Howe, a friend of Thomas's.

Thomas's NANM records date from the 1950s to the late 1990s. Some relate only to the association's Brooklyn chapter, Mu Te Or. The files include annual reports, correspondence with other officers, budgets, treasurer expense reports, newsletters, annual convention programs, performance programs, contact lists, financial statements, meeting minutes, constitutions, by-laws, and membership guidelines.

Thomas's personal papers mainly document his singing career. They are composed of scrapbooks of clippings, programs, and photographs; loose programs, photographs, and clippings; letters from friends, managers, and fans; Thomas's military records and letters; files for Norristown High School and Cheyney State Teachers College holding yearbooks, alumni association letters, and reunion programs; and correspondence and programs regarding Saint Mark's United Methodist Church. The photographs include publicity headshots and personal photographs of family and friends. Most photographs are in box 2, folder 3.

Alfred Howe appears to have been a friend of Thomas. He attended high school at the Williston Academy in Easthampton, Massachusetts (now the Williston Northampton School), and was a designer. His papers, dating from 1931 to 1948, include Williston Academy yearbooks; personal letters; photographs of family and friends; and clothing and architecture designs.

**Arrangement:** The collection is in two divisions: the Alfred Howe Papers and the Fred Thomas Files. Thomas's papers are in two sections: Personal Papers and National Association of Negro Musicians Records.

## **Key Terms**

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Administrative records  
Clippings (information artifacts)  
Correspondence  
Photographs  
Programs (documents)  
Scrapbooks

### **Subjects**

African American singers  
Blacks in opera  
Voice teachers

### **Geographic Names**

New York (N.Y.)

### **Occupations**

Singers  
Teachers

### **Names**

Howe, Alfred  
National Association of Negro Musicians (U.S.)  
St. Mark's United Methodist Church (Harlem, New York, N.Y.)

## Container List

### Alfred Howe Papers

- b. 1 f. 1 Designs 1931-1948
- b. 1 f. 2 Letters 1935-1948
- b. 1 f. 3 Photographs 1939-1942
- b. 1 f. 4 School Work 1931-1939
- Williston Academy
- b. 1 f. 5 1934-1942
- b. 2 f. 1 1936-1942

### Fred Thomas Files

#### Personal Papers

- b. 2 f. 2 Cheyney State Teachers College 1940-1943, 1964
- b. 2 f. 3-4 Letters, Programs, Photographs, and Clippings 1943-1998
- b. 3 f. 1-5 Letters, Programs, Photographs, and Clippings 1943-1998
- b. 4 f. 1-3 Letters, Programs, Photographs, and Clippings 1943-1998
- b. 4 f. 4 Military Records 1943-1945
- Norristown High School
- b. 4 f. 5 1935
- b. 5 f. 1 1935-1984
- b. 5 f. 2-3 Saint Mark's United Methodist Church 1948-1991

#### Scrapbooks

- v. 1 1938-1954
- v. 2 1942-1948
- v. 3 1948-1958
- v. 4 1951
- v. 5 1954-1956

### National Association of Negro Musicians Records

#### Mu Te Or (Brooklyn Branch)

- b. 5 f. 4 1953-1969
- b. 6 f. 1-2 1963-1991

#### National Organization

- b. 6 f. 3-5 1950s
- b. 7 f. 1-5 1950s-1960s
- b. 8 f. 1-4 1960s-1970s
- b. 9 f. 1-6 1970s
- b. 10 f. 1-5 1970s-1980s
- b. 11 f. 1-5 1980s
- b. 12 f. 1-4 1980s
- b. 13 f. 1-3 1980s-1990s
- b. 14 f. 1-4 1980s-1990s

Fred Thomas Files (cont.)  
National Association of Negro Musicians Records (cont.)  
National Organization (cont.)

b. 15 f. 1-5	1990s
b. 16 f. 1-4	1990s
b. 17 f. 1-5	1990s
b. 18 f. 1-6	1990s
b. 19 f. 1-4	1990s