



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*  
*Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Frances Benjamin Johnston and Thomas W. Smillie Glass Plate Negatives

NMAH.AC.0416

Brett Miller

2011

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# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Arrangement.....	4
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	3
Bibliography.....	4
Names and Subjects .....	4
Container Listing .....	5
Series 1: Glass Plate Negatives, 1893, 1906, circa 1888-1899.....	5
Series 2: Copy prints (reference copies), 1993.....	7

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Frances Benjamin Johnston and Thomas W. Smillie Glass Plate Negatives
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0416
<b>Date:</b>	1993 - 1993 circa 1888-1899, 1906
<b>Extent:</b>	2 Cubic feet (7 boxes)
<b>Creator:</b>	MacCormack, Forrest (intern) Smillie, T. W. (Thomas William), 1843-1917 Talman, Hugh (photographer) Domestic Life, Division of (NMAH, SI). Johnston, Frances Benjamin, 1864-1952
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	Twenty glass plate negatives and reference copy prints of the images taken between the late 1880s and the early 1900s by Frances Benjamin Johnston and Thomas W. Smillie. The images depict the skyline of Washington D.C., views from the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition, blueprints for the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building, and an unidentified orchestra.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Immediate source of acquisition unknown.

### Provenance

These negatives were in the Division of Domestic Life (now Division of Cultural and Community Life), National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution for many years. The numbers seem to be Smithsonian Office of Photographic Services (OPPS) negative numbers which would reinforce the notion that they were made by Smillie and/or Johnston.

The collection was transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Domestic Life (now Division of Cultural and Community Life), National Museum of American History, on August 20, 1991. Prior to this time they served as uncataloged reference material for the Division of Domestic Life (now Division of Cultural and Community Life).

### Related Materials

**Materials at the Smithsonian Institution**

**Smithsonian Institution Archives**

Records, circa 1883-1984 (SIA RU000529)

Field Research Photographs, circa 1909-1924 (SIA Acc. 02-086)

Personnel Records, 1892-1952 (SIA Acc. 05-123)

Collected Registers, 1908-1912 and undated (SIA Acc. 06-138)

### **National Anthropological Archives**

Glass Negatives of Indians (Collected by Bureau of American Ethnology)

## Processing Information

Processed by David Haberstich (curator), August 1999; revised by Brett Miller (intern), August, 2011. Photographic copy prints created by Forrest MacCormack (intern) and Hugh Talman (Office of Printing and Photographic Services), Fall, 1993. Finding aid authored by David Haberstich (curator), August, 1991; revised by David Haberstich in August, 2000; revised by Brett Miller, (intern) and Alison Oswald, archivist, August, 2011.

## Preferred Citation

Frances Benjamin Johnston and Thomas W. Smillie Glass Plate Negatives, 1888-1906,  
Archives Center, National Museum of American History

## Restrictions

The collection is open for research. Reference photograph copies should be used where possible. Gloves must be worn when handling unprotected photographs and negatives. Special care is required when handling the glass plate negatives both because of their large size and because some of the negatives are broken.

## Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning intellectual property rights. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

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## Biographical / Historical

While the origin and provenance of some of the glass plate negatives is uncertain, it is likely that the images were created by Smithsonian photographer and curator Thomas W. Smillie and by Frances Benjamin Johnston, a prominent female photographer who was a protege of Smillie's.

Thomas W. Smillie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1843 and emigrated to the United States when he was five years old. He attended Georgetown University, where he studied medicine and chemistry. Shortly thereafter he became a photographer for the Smithsonian and remained with the institution until his death in 1917. In 1896 he was named "custodian" of photography for the Institution, in essence becoming its first photography curator. He staged photographic exhibits and actively collected both images and equipment related to photography.

Frances Benjamin Johnston was an early pioneer for women in the field of photography and photojournalism. Born in 1864 in Grafton, West Virginia, Johnston studied art in Maryland and later at

the Académie Julien in Paris. Her high-profile family connection with the Eastman family as well as her insatiable appetite for knowledge about photographic processes quickly propelled her to a formidable professional career. Her work appeared in publications such as *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Cosmopolitan*, among others. As an apprentice to Thomas W. Smillie, Johnston was engaged to photograph the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She made Washington D.C. her home and had the opportunity to photograph a large number of high profile individuals and government officials, including five United States presidents. Her photography often documented mundane and commonplace aspects of life rather than spectacular or prominent ones. Later in her career she focused her photography on colonial architecture, with images of houses, barns, and other buildings that intentionally showed everyday life in the United States South rather than high profile structures which had already been well-documented. She moved to New Orleans in 1940 and died in 1952.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection consists of twenty glass plate negatives and associated reference copy prints depicting scenes from the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois as well as images of the Washington D.C. skyline dating from between 1888 and 1899. The glass plate negatives range in size from 17" x 20" to 20" x 24" while the silver gelatin, resin-coated paper prints are all 20" x 24". All the images are black and white.

**Series 1, Glass Plate Negatives, 1893, 1906, circa 1888-1899**, is arranged by a numbering system, possibly assigned by the Smithsonian Office of Printing and Photographic Services (OPPS). The numbers were etched or written on the negatives, for example 3107. The series begins with the numbered images from Washington DC (#3101-#3107), followed by images without identifying numbers. The numbered images from the 1893 Columbian Exposition (non-inclusive #11302-11359) come next, followed by the images without identifying numbers.

The images of Washington D.C., when arranged in the following sequence, form a panorama of the Washington D.C. city: #3103, #3107, #3104, #3101, #3106, #3105, #3102. The images were taken from the tower of the Smithsonian Castle facing north, beginning with a view of the United States Capitol Building in the east (#3102) and ending with a view of the incomplete Washington Monument in the west (#3103). An unnumbered image of the United States Capitol taken after 1899 from the tower of the Old Post Office and Clock Tower looking down Pennsylvania Avenue is included. Two unnumbered blueprints dated July 19, 1906 show the second and third floor layouts of the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building.

The images of the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition show various buildings built for the event as well as a replica of the Battleship Illinois which was constructed to illustrate advances in naval technology. Exterior views of the Administration Building, Government Building, Palace of Fine Arts, Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building as well as an interior view of the World's Fair Post Office in the Government Building are found among the negatives. A number of the images appear to have been taken from atop some of the buildings looking down.

One unnumbered and unidentified picture of a musical orchestra sitting on stage is included at the end of the series.

**Series 2, Copy prints, 1993**, include duplicate or, in some instances triplicate, photographic copy prints of the images from the glass plate negatives. In the case of #11311 and #11359, no copy prints exist. The silver gelatin prints on resin-coated paper were created in the fall of 1993.

## Arrangement

The collection is arranged in two series.

**Series 1: Glass Plate Negatives, 1893, 1906, circa 1888-1899**

**Series 2: Copy prints (reference copies), 1993**

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## Bibliography

Brown, Julie K. "Recovering Representation: U.S. Government Photographers at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893." *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 1997): 218-231.

*A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1889-1910*. Edited by Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock. Shelburne, VT: Clio Visualizing History, 1974. <http://www.cliohistory.org/exhibits/johnston/> (accessed August 12, 2011).

Crane, Frank W. "American Women Photographers." *Munsey's Magazine*, Vol. 11 (April-September, 1894): 398-408.

Hannum, Gillian Greenhill. "Frances Benjamin Johnston: Promoting Women Photographers in *The Ladies' Home Journal*." *Nineteenth Century* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2004): 22-29.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

Washington Monument (Washington, D.C.)

### Types of Materials:

Contact prints -- 1950-2000

Photographs -- Black-and-white negatives -- Glass -- 1890-1900

### Names:

Domestic Life, Division of (NMAH, SI).

World's Columbian Exposition (1893 : Chicago, Ill.) -- Photographs

### Geographic Names:

Chicago Ill. -- 1890-1900

Washington (D.C.) -- 1890-1900

White House (Washington, D.C.)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Glass Plate Negatives, 1893, 1906, circa 1888-1899

Box 1, Folder 1	#3101, [9th and 10th Streets, Washington D.C, Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 1, Folder 2	#3102, [United States Capitol Building, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 1, Folder 3	#3103, [Incomplete Washington Monument], circa 1888-1899
Box 2, Folder 1	#3104, [10th, 11th, 12th Streets, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 2, Folder 2	#3105, [Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Depot, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 2, Folder 3	#3106, [National Guard Armory Building, 8th, 7th Streets, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 3, Folder 1	#3107, [White House, Old Executive Office Building, United States Treasury Building], circa 1888-1899
Box 3, Folder 2	No Number, [Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building Blueprint, Second Floor], 1906 July 19
Box 3, Folder 3	No Number, [Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building Blueprint, Third Floor], 1906 July 19
Box 3, Folder 4	No Number, [United States Capitol, Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
Box 4, Folder 2	#11307, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, Palace of Fine Arts], 1893
Box 4, Folder 1	#11302, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Administration Building], 1893
Box 4, Folder 3	#11311, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Palace of Fine Arts], 1893
Box 5, Folder 1	#11318, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Replica of Battleship Illinois], 1893
Box 5, Folder 2	#11327, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition World's Fair Post Office, Government Building Interior], 1893

- Box 5, Folder 3      #11348, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Administration Building, Electrical Building], 1893
- Box 6, Folder 1      #11351, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Replica of Battleship Illinois], 1893
- Box 6, Folder 2      #11356, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Government Building], 1893
- Box 6, Folder 3      #11359, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Government Building and Replica of Battleship Illinois], 1893
- Box 6, Folder 4      No Number, [Unidentified Orchestra], undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*



## Series 2: Copy prints (reference copies), 1993

- Box 7, Folder 1 #3101, Reference Photograph, [9th and 10th Streets, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 1 #3102 Reference Photograph, [United States Capitol Building, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 1 #3103 Reference Photograph, [Incomplete Washington Monument], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 1 #3104 Reference Photograph, [10th, 11th, 12th Streets, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 2 #3105 Reference Photograph, [Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Depot, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 2 #3106 Reference Photograph, [National Guard Armory Building, 8th, 7th Streets, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 2 #3107 Reference Photograph, [White House, Old Executive Office Building, United States Treasury Building], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 2 No Number Reference Photograph, [Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building Blueprint, Third Floor], 1906 July 19
- Box 7, Folder 2 No Number Reference Photograph, [Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building Blueprint, Second Floor], 1906 July 19
- Box 7, Folder 2 No Number Reference Photograph, [United States Capitol, Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C. Cityscape], circa 1888-1899
- Box 7, Folder 3 #11302 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Administration Building], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 3 #11307 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, Fine Arts Building], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 3 #11318 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Replica of Battleship Illinois], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 4 #11327 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition World's Fair Post Office, Government Building Interior], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 4 #11348 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Administration Building, Electrical Building], 1893

- Box 7, Folder 4      #11351 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Replica of Battleship Illinois], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 4      #11356 Reference Photograph, [World's Fair: Columbian Exposition Government Building], 1893
- Box 7, Folder 4      No Number Reference Photograph, [Unidentified Orchestra], undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*