



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of the American Indian*

## Thomas Indian School glass plate negatives, 1900-1945

Emily Moazami

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Museum of the American Indian
<b>Title:</b>	Thomas Indian School glass plate negatives
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAI.AC.061
<b>Date:</b>	1900-1945
<b>Extent:</b>	85 Glass plate negatives (N49022-N49106)
<b>Creator:</b>	Thomas Indian School (Iroquois, N.Y.)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This collection contains 85 glass plate negatives depicting Iroquois students and student life at the Thomas Indian School on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation in New York state, circa 1900-1945.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This collection was donated by the grandchildren of Victor and Ethel Bissell Seneca.

### Related Materials

The New York State Archives in Albany, NY holds the Thomas Indian School Agency History Records and a collection of photographs.

### Processing Information

Processed by Emily Moazami, Assistant Head Archivist in 2017.

### Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Thomas Indian School glass plate negatives, Box and Folder Number; National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

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### Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Located on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation in New York State, the Thomas Asylum for Orphaned and Destitute Indian Children was established as a private institution in 1855 and named after benefactor Philip E. Thomas. Orphaned and poor American Indian children from the Seneca [Cattaraugus], Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Tuscarora communities were sent to the asylum for boarding and care. In 1875 the institution was transferred to the State of New York and run under the New York State Board of Charities. It was charged with the education and vocational training of American Indian children in their care, which is reported to have included acculturation and assimilation of Native students by means of prohibiting use of Native languages and traditional cultural practices. In 1905 the institution was renamed the Thomas Indian School. By this time, eight grades were offered at the school, which had a half-day system with students attending classes for part of the day and working the other half. By 1930, the School was classified as a junior high school, but it was eventually closed in 1957 by the State.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection contains 85 glass plate negatives depicting Iroquois students and student life at the Thomas Indian School circa 1900-1945. The images depict student and class portraits; school activities such as school plays or performances, basketball, football, and Girl Scouts; classes such as woodworking, cooking, and agriculture; and campus buildings and grounds. The photographer is unknown, but was probably affiliated with the school. Iroquois children from Seneca [Cattaraugus], Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Tuscarora communities attended the school.

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## Arrangement

This collection is intellectually arranged in 3 series. **Series 1:** Student and class portraits, **Series 2:** School activities and classes, **Series 3:** School buildings and grounds. The collection is physically organized by negative number.

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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:

Cayuga  
Education -- school buildings  
Indians of North America -- Cultural assimilation  
Indians of North America -- Education  
Indians of North America -- New York (State)  
Iroquois  
Mohawk  
Oneida  
Onondaga  
Schools -- Exercises and recreations  
Seneca [Cattaraugus]

Cultures:

Cayuga  
Iroquois  
Mohawk  
Oneida  
Onondaga  
Seneca [Cattaraugus]

Types of Materials:

Glass negatives

Names:

Thomas Indian School (Iroquois, N.Y.)

Geographic Names:

Cattaraugus Indian Reservation (N.Y.)  
New York (State)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Student and class portraits, 1900-1945

*25 Glass plate negatives*

*Box 1*

This series contains 25 glass plate negatives mostly depicting Thomas Indians School class portraits from circa 1900-1945. Many of the negatives depict graduating students and the bulk of the images were shot outdoors on the school campus.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| Box 1 | N49022: Class portrait, circa 1920-1925<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49022</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait on campus on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.  |
| Box 1 | N49024: Class portrait, circa 1920-1925<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49024</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait outside a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The girls are wearing dresses and the boys are in suits. They are holding diplomas in their hands.            |
| Box 1 | N49026: Class portrait, circa 1915-1925<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49026</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait outside a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.   |
| Box 2 | N49043: Class portrait, circa 1913-1920<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49043</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait outside campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The girls are wearing dresses and they are holding diplomas in their hands.                                     |
| Box 2 | N49047: Class Portrait, circa 1913-1920<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49047</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait. A group of boys and girls are posing on a stage with their diplomas.   |
| Box 2 | N49049: Class portrait, circa 1913-1920<br><a href="#">Image(s): N49049</a><br>A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait outdoors on campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The girls are wearing dresses, the boys are in suits and ties, and they are holding diplomas in their hands. |

- Box 2                      N49050: Class portrait, circa 1913-1920  
[Image\(s\): N49050](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School class portrait outside a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The girls are wearing dresses, the boys are in suits, and they are holding diplomas in their hands.
- Box 2                      N49051: Class of 1914 portrait, 1914  
[Image\(s\): N49051](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a group girls and one boy posing in front of a 1914 banner for their Thomas Indian School class portrait.
- Box 2                      N49052: Class of 1914 portrait , 1914  
[Image\(s\): N49052](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a group of students posing on a stage for their Thomas Indian School 1914 class portrait.
- Box 2                      N49053: Class of 1912 portrait, 1912  
[Image\(s\): N49053](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School 1912 class portrait.
- Box 3                      N49054: Class portrait, circa 1900-1920  
[Image\(s\): N49054](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a large group portrait outside a Thomas Indian School campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The students depicted in the image range in age from very young to teenagers.
- Box 3                      N49055: Class portrait, circa 1900-1920  
[Image\(s\): N49055](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting elementary-age Thomas Indian School students standing on an outdoor stage in cap and gowns.
- Box 3                      N49065: Class portrait, circa 1900-1920  
[Image\(s\): N49065](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School boys posing outside with their diplomas.
- Box 4                      N49069: Class portrait, circa 1935-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49069](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School group portrait outside a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.
- Box 4                      N49077: Class portrait, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49077](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an unidentified Thomas Indian School student posing with his diploma in the campus yard.

Box 4

N49080: Class portrait, circa 1935-1945

[Image\(s\): N49080](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students posing for an outdoor group portrait.

Box 4

N49081: Class portrait, circa 1915-1920

[Image\(s\): N49081](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 4

N49082: Class portrait, circa 1935-1945

[Image\(s\): N49082](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School group portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 4

N49083: Class portrait, circa 1935-1945

[Image\(s\): N49083](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 5

N49085: Class portrait, circa 1915-1920

[Image\(s\): N49085](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 5

N49087: Class portrait, circa 1930-1940

[Image\(s\): N49087](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a large group of Thomas Indian School students posing outside a campus building.

Box 5

N49092: Class portrait, circa 1930-1940

[Image\(s\): N49092](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor portrait of Thomas Indian School students and possibly teachers standing outside a school building.

Box 6

N49101: Class portrait, circa 1915-1925

[Image\(s\): N49101](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 6

N49102: Class portrait, circa 1915-1925



[Image\(s\): N49102](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. The students are holding diplomas in their hands.

Box 6

N49103: Class portrait, circa 1913-1920

[Image\(s\): N49103](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor Thomas Indian School class portrait. Some students are holding diplomas in their hands.

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## Series 2: School activities and classes, 1900-1945

### *46 Glass plate negatives*

#### *Box 1*

This series contains 46 glass plate negatives depicting the school activities and classes at the Thomas Indian School from circa 1900-1945. The negatives document activities and classes such as agriculture including farming and animal husbandry; school plays or performances, Christmas celebrations, and markets or fairs; sports including basketball and football; groups such as Girl Scouts and possibly Boy Scouts; classes such as woodworking and cooking; health care such as doctor visits in the infirmary; and construction, ground maintenance, and labor on the Thomas Indian School campus.

Box 1

N49023: School play, circa 1900-1935

[Image\(s\): N49023](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of young Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photograph was possibly shot at a play rehearsal.

Box 1

N49027: School play, circa 1900-1935

[Image\(s\): N49027](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of young Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo was possibly shot at a play rehearsal.

Box 1

N49028: School play, circa 1910-1935

[Image\(s\): N49028](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of young Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo was possibly shot at a play rehearsal.

Box 2

N49044: School play, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49044](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo may have been shot at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 2

N49045: School play, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49045](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo may have been shot at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 2

N49046: School play, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49046](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo may have been shot at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 2

N49048: School play, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49048](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo may have been shot at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 5

N49099: School play, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49099](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo was possibly taken at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 4

N49074: School play, 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49074](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo was possibly shot at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 4

N49075: School play, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49075](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students dressed in costumes and standing on a stage in front of rows of empty chairs. This photo was possibly taken at a play dress rehearsal.

Box 1

N49029: Wood shop class, circa 1910-1935

[Image\(s\): N49029](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a teacher and students working in what appears to be the wood shop at the Thomas Indian School.

Box 5

N49093: Cooking class, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49093](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students in a cooking class. The girls are dressed in aprons and they are standing at individual stoves.

Box 6

N49104: Cooking class, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49104](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students in a cooking class. The girls are dressed in aprons and they are standing at individual stoves.

Box 1

N49035: Students working outside, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49035](#)

A glass plate negative depicting men (possibly students) working outside on a snowy Thomas Indian School campus grounds.

Box 1

N49038: Students working outside, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49038](#)

A glass plate negative depicting men, possibly Thomas Indian School students, digging a trench.

- Box 5                      N49100: Student working outside, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49100](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students building a structure in a snowy field.
- Box 5                      N49089: Students working outside, circa 1900-1930  
[Image\(s\): N49089](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students digging a trench in an open field.
- Box 5                      N49090: Students working outside, circa 1900-1930  
[Image\(s\): N49090](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a group of Thomas Indian School students standing with shovels in front of a trench.
- Box 5                      N49091: Students working outside, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49091](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a person on horseback with an American flag leading a line of Thomas Indian School students on a road next to a pond. The students are possibly Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in uniform.
- Box 4                      N49073: Students with wagon, circa 1900-1930  
[Image\(s\): N49073](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students, and possibly teachers, posing with a horse-pulled hay wagon outside a barn.
- Box 5                      N49097: Students with hay wagon, circa 1900-1930  
[Image\(s\): N49097](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students loading hay into a wagon in front of various farm buildings.
- Box 6                      N49105: Students with wagon, circa 1900-1930  
[Image\(s\): N49105](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students, and possibly teachers, posing with a horse-pulled hay wagon outside a barn.
- Box 2                      N49041: Cow, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49041](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a cow on a rope standing outside a Thomas Indian School building.
- Box 2                      N49042: Cow, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49042](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a cow on a rope standing outside a Thomas Indian School building.
- Box 4                      N49072: Cow, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49072](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a cow eating grass in an open field on the Thomas Indian School grounds.

Box 5

N49098: Student with cow, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49098](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a man, possibly a Thomas Indian School student, leading a cow on a rope.

Box 3

N49056: Horses, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\): N49056](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students standing in front a barn with three teams of horses.

Box 3

N49068: Horse, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49068](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a horse walking in an open field at the Thomas Indian School.

Box 3

N49060: Men's basketball team, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49060](#)

A glass plate negative depicting the Thomas Indian School men's basketball team posing on the steps of a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 3

N49061: Men's basketball team, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49061](#)

A glass plate negative depicting the Thomas Indian School men's basketball team posing on the steps of a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 3

N49063: Football team, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49063](#)

A glass plate negative depicting the Thomas Indian School football team posing on the steps of a campus building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 4

N49070: Football team, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49070](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School football team in uniforms posing outside a campus building.

Box 5

N49094: Football team, circa 1920-1945

[Image\(s\): N49094](#)

A glass plate negative depicting the Thomas Indian School football team posing in a line-up position outside a school building.

Box 3

N49059: Girl Scouts, 1934

[Image\(s\): N49059](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School Girl Scouts in uniforms posing in front of a school building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 3

N49062: Girl Scouts, 1934

[Image\(s\): N49062](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School Girl Scouts in uniform posing in front of a campus building with their drum and bugle instruments.

Box 3

N49064: Girl Scouts, 1934

[Image\(s\): N49064](#)

A glass plate negative depicting the Thomas Indian School Girl Scouts in uniform posing in front of a campus building with their drum and bugle instruments.

Box 3

N49066: Girl Scouts, 1934

[Image\(s\): N49066](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School Girl Scouts in uniform posing outside a school building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 5

N49086: Students in line, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49086](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a person on horseback leading a line of Thomas Indian School students on a road next to a pond. The students are possibly Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in uniform.

Box 4

N49071: Fair display, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49071](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a display of dolls and a doll house possibly at an Thomas Indian School fair or market.

Box 4

N49076: Display table, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49076](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a display table probably at the Thomas Indian School. The tables are lined with food, flowers, plates, and utensils. There are also uniforms hanging above the tables.

Box 5

N49096: Fair display, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49096](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an outdoor courtyard with crafts and other objects on display including, blankets, lamps, stuffed animals, and baskets. This image was probably shot at the Thomas Indian School.

Box 4

N49079: Students in Christmas costumes, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49079](#)

A glass plate negative depicting Thomas Indian School students posing with Christmas decorations. The boys are wearing Santa Claus costumes and girls are in dresses.

Box 4

N49084: Student in profile, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49084](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School student's profile.

Box 5

N49088: Student in profile, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49088](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School student's profile.

Box 3

N49067: Infirmary, 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49067](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School hospital room or infirmary.

Box 5

N49095: RESTRICTED: Doctor's visit, circa 1900-1930

[Image\(s\)](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a Thomas Indian School student receiving a shot from a doctor. A nurse and another woman assist.

This photograph is restricted for privacy.

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## Series 3: School buildings and grounds, 1900-1945

### *14 Glass plate negatives*

#### *Box 1*

This series contains 14 glass plate negatives that depict Thomas Indian School buildings and school grounds circa 1900-1945. Among the facilities depicted are administration, dormitory, and hospital buildings.

- Box 1                      N49025: Hospital building, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49025](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting an exterior view of the Thomas Indian School hospital building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49030: School grounds, circa 1900-1935  
[Image\(s\): N49030](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting an open field with horses and carts on the Thomas Indian School grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49031: School grounds, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49031](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a snowy road and landscape on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49032: School grounds, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49032](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a snowy landscape on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49033: School grounds, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49033](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a snowy field on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49034: School grounds, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49034](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a snowy field on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49036: School grounds, circa 1900-1945  
[Image\(s\): N49036](#)  
A glass plate negative depicting a snowy field on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.
- Box 1                      N49037: School grounds, circa 1900-1945



[Image\(s\): N49037](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a snowy field on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 2

N49039: School grounds, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49039](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a snowy wooded area on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 2

N49040: School grounds, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49040](#)

A glass plate negative depicting a snowy wooded area on the Thomas Indian School campus grounds on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 3

N49057: School building, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49057](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an exterior view of a Thomas Indian School brick building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 3

N49058: School building, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49058](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an exterior view of a Thomas Indian School brick building on the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York.

Box 4

N49078: School buildings, circa 1900-1945

[Image\(s\): N49078](#)

A glass plate negative depicting an exterior view of a group of Thomas Indian School buildings linked by a walkway.

Box 6

N49106: School building, circa 1920-1930

[Image\(s\): N49106](#)

Glass plate negative depicting an exterior view of a Thomas Indian School building with automobiles parked in front.

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