



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

Estrella Lake Montgomery photographs

Mattie Lewis

2025

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	Estrella Lake Montgomery photographs
Date:	Circa 1950
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.346
Creator:	Montgomery, Estrella Lake (1908-2006)
Extent:	12 Photographic prints
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection includes twelve black and white photographs taken by Estrella Lake Montgomery, circa 1950 among the Emberá (Choikoi), K'iche' Maya (Quiché), Ticuna, Wayuu, and Yagua communities in Central and South America.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Estrella Lake Montgomery, 1991.

Separated Materials

Estrella Lake Montgomery also donated various items from the communities she visited, catalog numbers 25/3570-25/3579. Of note is a mat used during the Ticuna Pelazon ritual, [25/3571](#) .

Processing Information

Collection processed by Mattie Lewis, Archives Technician in 2025.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; DATE (if known); Estrella Lake Montgomery photographs, image #, NMAI.AC.346; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Access to NMAI Archives Center collections is by appointment only, Monday - Friday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment (phone: 301-238-1400, email: nmaiarchives@si.edu).

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Biographical / Historical

Estrella Lake Montgomery (1908-2006) was born in Brule, Wisconsin. She was married to George W. Montgomery and had one son, William D. Montgomery. Montgomery worked as a photojournalist and author.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains twelve 8x10 in. black and white photographs taken by Estrella Lake Montgomery during her travels in Central and South America and a freelance photojournalist. On the back of each photograph is a description written by Montgomery and is included under the individual listing. Some of the culture terms used are outdated and the descriptions are Montgomery's opinions and do not reflect the views of the National Museum of the American Indian.

Image numbers P26029-P26040.

Arrangement

Arranged first by location then by catalog number.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Emberá (Choikoi)
- K'iche' Maya (Quiché)
- Ticuna (Tucuna)
- Wayuu (Guajira/Goajiro)
- Yagua (Yahua)

Cultures:

- Emberá (Choikoi)
- K'iche' Maya (Quiché)
- Ticuna (Tucuna)
- Wayuu (Guajira/Goajiro)
- Yagua (Yahua)

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white photographs

Container Listing

	Colombia, circa 1950 5 Photographic prints Notes: Two photographs of Wayuu women and three photographs of a Ticuna Pelazon puberty ceremony taken in Colombia.
Photo-folder 1	P26030: Fermented corn mash, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph showing a group of women and young children. The women are chewing corn. Montgomery is pictured standing on the right. The note from Montgomery says "A human brewery in operation. The Goajira women sit around in a circle chewing kernels of corn into a mash which they then spit into a receptacle. When this is full, it is dumped into the large crock, water is added and the mess is left in the sun to ferment. This makes a powerful alcoholic beverage. Author's face shows stomach's reaction. Goajira Penninsula, Colombia." Culture: Wayuu (Guajira/Goajiro)
Photo-folder 1	P26035: Pelazon hair cut, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of a girl. Note on the back says "Ticuna Indian girl weeps from ordeal of Pelazon, sadistic puberty hair pulling ceremony. Photo was posed with scissors as Colombian government forbids this part of ritual. Ticuna Indians, Jungles of the Amazon." Culture: Ticuna (Tucuna)
Photo-folder 1	P26036: Pelazon ceremony, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photo of a girl at her Pelazon ceremony, surrounded by women. Note on the back says "The isolation hut where the girl spent three months is in the background. (Small hut made of thin slats, decorated with symbols.) Here the woman witch doctor who has charge of this part of the ceremony, helps the "bell of the ball" to her feet after her ordeal. Ceremonial rug is made of bark and painted with symbols." Culture: Ticuna (Tucuna)
Photo-folder 1	P26037: Ticuna hut, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of a Ticuna hut. Montgomery is on the ladder. Note on the back says "Ticuna huts are built up on poles. There are no doors, windows or walls. The ladder is pulled up at night into the hut. Jungles, Amazon River."

	Culture: Ticuna (Tucuna)
Photo-folder 1	P26038: Woman weaving hammock, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of a woman weaving a hammock with her baby. Montgomery looks on. Note on the back says "Indians of the arid Goajira Peninsula make expert hammocks on primitive looms. Their homes are built of poles with cactus roofs. Although they live by the shores of the Caribbean Sea, drinking water has to be transported from government-built public water systems." Culture: Wayuu (Guajira/Goajiro)
	Guatemala, circa 1950 2 Photographic prints Notes: Two 8 x 10 in. black and white photographs taken by Estrella Lake Montgomery in Guatemala. One depicts women spinning fibre and the other is of a marketplace.
Photo-folder 2	P26029: Two women spinning fiber, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of one woman spinning fiber and another weaving. Note on the back says "Primitive spinning and weaving at Santiago on Lake Atitlan in Guatemala. Designs in the fabrics are often very intricate and color past. Indians descendants of Maya-Quiche tribes." Culture: K'iche' Maya (Quiché)
Photo-folder 2	P26031: Santiago marketplace, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of an outdoor marketplace in Santiago, Guatemala. Montgomery stands in the middle. Note on the back says "Author mingles with the Natives in the colorful marketplace in Santiago, Guatemala. Note halo headdress of women. Useful in carrying jugs of water from Lake Atitlan on their heads." Culture: K'iche' Maya (Quiché)
	Panama, circa 1950 3 Photographic prints Notes: Three photographs depicting Emberá (Choikoi) women cooking and a medicine man working. Note on the back says "Choco Indian medicine man uses hand carved mahogany medicine stick along with poultices of herbs, leaves, and bark to heal the patient's lower abdominal wound. Note the intelligence of this remarkable primitive healer. Choco Indians of the Darien Province of Panama."
Photo-folder 3	P26032: Curing ceremony, circa 1950

	1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white Emberá (Choikoi) photograph depicting a group of people surrounding an ill man lying on the ground. Note on the back says "Choco Indian curing ceremony. Small, tent-like contraption is mini hospital of the medicine man who sits at the head of the patient rubbing his medicine sticks. The Choco Indians live in the jungles of the dangerous Darien Province of Panama." Culture: Emberá (Choikoi)
Photo-folder 3	P26033: Women cooking, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph showing three women cooking with young children. Note on the back says "Kitchen of Choco Indians features log firing. At right, old woman peels banana, one of the basic foods of the tribe." Culture: Emberá (Choikoi)
Photo-folder 3	P26040: Medicine man, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph of an Emberá (Choikoi) medicine man. Note on back says "Choco Indian medicine man uses hand carved mahogany medicine stick along with poultices of herbs, leaves, and bark to heal the patient's lower abdominal wound. Note the intelligence of this remarkable primitive healer. Choco Indians of the Darien Province of Panama." Culture: Emberá (Choikoi)
	Peru, circa 1950 2 Photographic prints Notes: Two 8x10 in. black and white photographs Yagua men taken in Peru by Estrella Lake Montgomery.
Photo-folder 4	P26034: Man with dart bag, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph depicting a side view of a man holding a bag and dart roll. Note on the back says "Yagua Indian shows intricate and practical method of storing and carrying blow gun darts. The Yagua's grass skirt and other ornamentation had been dyed with a red coloring in honor of the occasion of my visit." Culture: Yagua
Photo-folder 4	P26039: Man with bow and arrows, circa 1950 1 Photographic print Notes: One 8x10 in. black and white photograph showing a man kneeling with a bow and arrows. Note on the back says "Yagua Indian bow and arrows. Other Indian tribes in the Amazon region have adopted this type of weaponry. The Yaguas are most proficient with long blow guns."

Culture: Yagua