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#### **Alonzo Thomas Collection**

#### **Collection Summary**

Title: Alonzo Thomas Collection

Call Number: MS 2006-12

Size: 3.0 linear feet (3 boxes)

**Acquisition:** Purchased from Dennis Coffey, 11-2008

Processed by: JZ, 4-2016

**Restrictions:** None

## **Literary Rights**

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#### **Content Note**

The Alonzo Thomas collection consists of images, press clippings, scrapbooks, correspondence, and ephemera which document the personal life and professional career of Alonzo Thomas, a Topeka-based watch manufacturer and jeweler.

### **Biography**

Alonzo Thomas was born on January 28, 1877, in Topeka, Kansas, to Chester and Mary Elizabeth Thomas. He studied horology – or watchmaking – at what would become the Bradley Polytechnic Institute in Peoria, Illinois, before opening his first store in Topeka near the Santa Fe railroad depot. In 1902 Thomas married British-born Annie B. Porter, who eventually became secretary-treasurer of his business, the Santa Fe Watch Company. Since railroad employees needed highly accurate timepieces on the job, Thomas's Santa Fe Special watch became popular within the profession, as well as with military service members. During the 1910s and 1920s the company dealt in watches and jewelry and was innovative in conducting mail-order business and allowing for payment through the installment plan. In 1942 the couple sold the business and retired, traveling and devoting themselves

to philanthropy within the Topeka region. Alonzo Thomas died on January 1, 1969; Annie survived him until 1973.

## **Series Listing**

Series 1	Box 1 FF 1	Correspondence. This series consists of letters written to and by Alonzo Thomas, 1916 and 1955.
Series 2	Box 1 FF 2-5, Box 2	Images. This series houses images of Thomas's family and pictures related to the Santa Fe Watch Company. Also present are dozens of pictures depicting the Mexican Revolution, c. 1870-1942.
Series 3	Box 1 FF 6-9, Box 3	Scrapbooks and Artifacts. This series contains one large scrapbook of photographs, news clippings, and handmade holiday cards by Thomas's employees, all of which provide a history of the Santa Fe Watch Company. Also included are two smaller scrapbooks, as well as the guest book for Alonzo and Annie's wedding and some loose press clippings, 1891-1971.

## **Box and Folder Listing**

# **Series 1 – Correspondence**

Box 1	FF 1	A letter dated April 20, 1916, from American soldier George Webb to Thomas; the body of the letter concerns photos of the Mexican
		Revolution sent by the former to the latter. A letter dated February 19,
		1951, from Bill Hyden to Thomas requesting information on the
		Cherokee Strip Land Run of 1893, at which the latter was present. A
		typed response, dated February 26, 1951, from Thomas to Hyden on
		his memories of the event.

## Series 2 – Images

Box 1	FF 2	Thomas family photographs, c. 1870-1942
Box 1	FF 3	Employees of the Santa Fe Watch Company, c. 1920s. Display windows of the Santa Fe Watch Company, c. 1920s-1930s. Downtown Topeka street scenes, c. 1920s-1930s.
Box 1	FF 4	Eight photos of Mexican Revolution-era scenes and military leaders, including Pancho Villa (all have typed or written captions), c. 1916-1917

Box 2	Picture postcards of the Mexican Revolution; many of these were taken and sold to the public by W. H. Horne, a well-known photographer
	based in El Paso, c. 1915-1917. Pictures of American service members
	in Mexico, 1916-1917. These photos have captions which may have
	been typed by George Webb, and occasionally note that Santa Fe
	Special watches were worn and prized by American soldiers taking part
	in the expedition to capture Pancho Villa.

Box 1 FF 5 Two photos of the Thomas house in Topeka, 1929 and c. 1930

# Series 3 – Scrapbooks and Artifacts

Box 1	FF 6	The Wedded Life by J. R. Miller (wedding guest book)
Box 1	FF 7	Magazine article on Alonzo Thomas and the Santa Fe Watch Company, c. late 1920s. Newspaper article on the new Thomas home in Topeka, 1930. Newspaper article on a government-censored letter to Annie Thomas from her British relatives, 1941.
Box 1	FF 8	Scrapbook containing a manuscript, original and reproduced news clippings, and photos on the Thomas family and its associates, 1891-c. 1961
Box 1	FF 9	Scrapbook containing news clippings on the death of Alonzo Thomas and current events in the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as photos of the Cherokee Strip Land Run of 1893
Box 3		Scrapbook on the history of the Santa Fe Watch Company, c. 1910s-1950s

For information, please contact us at:

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