

# ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

## A Guide to the Tom Dorsey (Tom Two Arrows) Collection

### Collection Summary

**Collection Title:** Tom Dorsey (Tom Two Arrows)

**Call Number:** MG 232

**Creator:** Lauren Whitehead

**Inclusive Dates:** 1935-2007

**Bulk Dates:** 1942, 2002, 2007

**Abstract:** A collection of documents, photographs and samples of artwork relating to the life and work of Tom Dorsey, or Tom Two Arrows an Onondagan-adopted Lenni-Lenape (Delaware) Indian and artist based in the Albany area.

**Quantity:** 15 folders in 1 manuscript box, 1 small box

### Administrative Information

**Custodial History:** Some of items in this collection are directly from the 3 AIHA exhibitions that featured Dorsey's work (1942, 2002, 2007). The earliest items were from the AIHA commission of Tom Dorsey to create works in 1942. Other ephemera donated later from Dorsey himself include correspondence and originally designed stationary. Some items were loaned out from the Albany Institute to the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences and the American Indian Archeological Institute, among other institutions in 1989.

**Preferred Citation:** Tom Dorsey (Tom Two Arrows). Albany Institute of History & Art Library, New York.

**Acquisition Information:**

Accession #: LIB

Accession Date:

**Processing Information:**

Processed by Lauren Whitehead; completed on 10/12/12

### Restrictions

**Restrictions on Access:**

None

**Restrictions on Use:** Permission to publish material must be obtained in writing prior to publication from the Chief Librarian & Archivist, Albany Institute of History & Art, 125 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12210.

## Index Term

### Persons

Bernstein, Roberta  
Dorsey, Tom  
Dunn, Dorothy  
Hatch Jr., John D.  
Lang, Ed  
Leonard, Okanta  
Wheeler, Robert G.

### Organizations

Albany Institute of History and Art  
American Indian Archeological Institute  
Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences

### Subjects

**Indians of North America (Native Americans)**

**Indian Art**

**Art, American—Iroquois Art**

### Places

Albany, NY  
Rochester, NY  
Nedrow, NY—Onondaga Reservation

### Document Types

Correspondence  
Photographs  
Slides  
Stationary  
Journal publications/articles  
Newspaper clippings  
Exhibition materials  
Art Labels

### Titles

## Biography/History of

Albany artist, Thomas J. Dorsey, (1920-1993), is also known by his Indian name, Tom Two Arrows. At age 21 he was commissioned by the Albany Institute of History & Art to create a series of paintings depicting Iroquois games and dances as a result of the interest and enthusiasm of John D. Hatch Jr., who served as director from 1940-1948. Dorsey, a member of the Delaware (Lenni-Lenape) tribe and adopted by the Onondagas, was a graduate of Albany High School where he studied with Herbert Steinke (1894-1978/79). While working on this project, Dorsey spent six weeks on the Onondaga reservation in Nedrow, near Syracuse, NY. Dorsey served in the armed services during World War II during which time he became a sergeant.

### Scope and Contents of the Records/Papers/Collection

This collection contains thorough correspondence including handwritten letters and telegrams between Tom Dorsey and the Albany Institute spanning 30 years. Also included are exhibit labels from the 1942 show written by Dorsey himself. These are accompanied by newer labels and exhibit summaries, which were created and used by the museum in the later exhibitions. Photographs of original Dorsey works and of everyday life on the Onondaga reservation, along with some of the artist's original stationary designs can be found as well. Dorsey was mentioned in and contributed to many journals and published works including a play entitled "A Song, a Dance, a Story..." put on by the Capital Repertory Theater in Albany, the script of which is included in the manuscript collection. Dorsey also illustrated children's books, copies of which are contained the AIHA special collections. Some miscellaneous items within the collection are Dorsey's resume and a train ticket that belonged to him. The collection deals almost exclusively with Dorsey's professional life and his interactions with the Albany Institute, and there is very little about his personal life other than a death announcement from a local paper and his resume.

### Organization of the Records/Papers/Collection

This collection is organized in 15 fifteen folders by item type. The extensive correspondence-related documents have been broken up into 6 folders chronologically. Various material relating to the 1942 exhibition and the 2002/2007 exhibition are included in respective folders however all journals and published articles have been grouped together regardless of their subject. This is also the case with newspaper clippings and photographs. Slides have been separated into a small box to ensure proper preservation, but are kept within the larger manuscript box.

### Related Material

\*\*See Tom Dorsey Curatorial File:

- Loan agreements
- AIHA Archive letter
- Exhibition label copies
- All material regarding commission or loans
- More recent correspondence between Dorsey and the AIHA

### Separated Materials

Exhibition files (1942, 2002, 2007)

Books;

- Accessioned in Special Collections at AIHA
  - o Shippen, Katherine B., Lightfoot: the story of an Indian boy. The Viking Press: New York (1950).
  - o Bulla, Clyde Robert, Eagle Feather. Thomas Y. Crowell Company: New York (1953).

### Other Finding Aids

\*\*possible over-sized photograph exists

### Detailed Description of the Records/Papers/Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series #	Box	Folder	Description of items
	1	1	Stationary:

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- #1. Christmas card with Dorsey print on front—not dated
  - #2. Lithograph cards: (2) Dorsey prints on cards with envelopes—not dated
  - #3. Letter: on Dorsey stationary, to Hatch—dated August 1944
  - #4. Signature sample: “Dorsey” name in arrow design
  - #5. Letter: on Dorsey stationary, addressed “Dear friend...”—dated April 1944, heading reads “Onondaga Indian Reservation”
  - #6. Program: “Army Air Forces Technical Training Command; Sunday Band Concert”; designed by Dorsey—dated March 1945
- Published items (articles, books, etc.)

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- #1. Book: “Eagle Feather” by Clyde Robert Bulla, illustrated by Dorsey, reprint—dated 1994
  - #2. Article: excerpt from *The Conservationist* (Jan.-Feb. 1976) featuring paintings by Dorsey--photocopy
  - #3. Journals: (2) editions of *Museum Service* (Oct. 1938 and May 1940), one contains the article “Indian Arts and Crafts Project” and the other features an article on Seneca Woodcarving
  - #4. Scripts: (2) copies of “A Song, a Dance, a Story: Legends from the Iroquois Longhouse”—dated Dec. 2006
  - #5. Journals: (2) editions of *Indians at Work* from Nov. and Dec. 1940
- Newspaper clippings:
- #1. Article: “Indian Art in the Schools” by Dorothy Dunn from the United States Indian School in Santa Fe, NM—dated 1935
  - #2. Article: “Time Off; A Week of Diversions”, advertising “Iroquois Games and Dances: Paintings by Tom Two Arrows” exhibit in the *Wall Street Journal*—dated March 2002
  - #3. Article: “Retrospective; Portrait of the Onondagas” from *Northeast Arts & Antiques*—dated Feb. 2002
  - #4. Article: “Paintings by Tom Two Arrows shown in Albany,

NY”, from the *New York-Pennsylvania Collector*—dated March 2002

#5. Article: with photograph of Dorsey “Library Murals Now Shown; Work of Artist on Field” from Seymour Johnson Field discussing Dorsey’s murals—not dated

#6. Article: “Albany Indian Artist, in Army, Wins Fame” with picture of painting—dated June 1943, photocopy

#7. Article: “Brush Marks” by Peg Churchill, columnist for the *Daily Gazette*—dated 1974

#8. Article: “Special Exhibits at Children’s Museum” in California, from the *Allen’s Press Clipping Bureau*; Dorsey’s work displayed at Children’s Museum at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor—dated August 1943

#9. Obituary: for Bernard A. Dorsey, Tom’s brother—dated 2007

#10. Obituary: for Dorsey—dated Oct. 30, 1993

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Slides:

- Depicting the 2002 exhibit set up at AIHA of “Iroquois Games and Dances”

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Exhibit labels:

- Original labels conceived by Tom Dorsey for the 1942 exhibit of “Iroquois Games and Dances” (photocopies—see Dorsey curatorial file for original tissue copies)

1. “Hunting”
2. “Lacrosse”
3. “Running Deer”
4. “Snowsnake”
5. “Cleared Land”
6. “Peach Stone Game”
7. “Green Corn Dance”
8. “Let us Eat”
9. “Treat of Canandaigua”
10. “Women’s Dance”
11. “War Dance”
12. “Partridge Dance”
13. “Husk Face Dancers”
14. “Fish Dance”
15. “I Come From Water”

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1942 Exhibit materials:

#1. Series summaries, “Set of 17

panels, gouache on composition board...”—dated 1942

#2. Article: “A Review of ‘Iroquois Games and Dances’; Tempera Paintings by Tom Dorsey” from the American Federation of Arts by Florence S. Berryman and Tom Dorsey—dated 1940s

#3. Labels: (2) on index cards, appear to be original “Hunting” and “Treaty of Canandaigua”

#4. Case History: for Dorsey—dated Jan. 1942

#5. Collection note: listing of paintings both framed and unframed and silk-screens, contains dates of accession (1942, 1943, 1958, 1989)

#6. Label: Original label for “Harvest Dance”, on tissue paper

#7. Auction list: for paintings from “Iroquois Games and Dances”, circulated by the American Federation of Arts

#8. Circuit listing: For “Iroquois Games and Dances” exhibit for the year 1943-1944 (lists all participating institutions planning to show works

2002/2007 Exhibit materials

#1. Description of exhibit: “Iroquois Games and Dances: Paintings by Tom Two Arrows”, summary of Dorsey’s life/work and labels for each painting

Photographs:

#1. Envelope of small copies: 12 small copies of photographs; some sacred images—appear to be slides, not dated

#2. Photo: man playing instrument, larger size—not dated

#3. Photos: 4 smaller photos on cardboard backing; all from exhibit of 17 panels (“War Dance”, “Onondaga Harvest Dance”, “Peach Stone Game”, “Women’s Dance”)

#4. Photos: 4 smaller photos on cardboard backing, all from exhibit of 17 panels (“Husk Face Dance”, “Treaty of Canandaigua”, “Healing”, “Cleared Land”)

#5. Photograph: photo-static copy of Dorsey at work in studio—not

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- dated
- #6. Photograph: of musical performance, man on stage playing instrument before crowd—not dated
- #7. Photograph: Roger Hill, Indian youth teaching mask cutting from bass wood to group of Onondagas (Dorsey included)—dated 1939
- #8. Photograph: of print “Jun N Ta O Wan” (Fish Dance)—dated 1942
- #9. Photograph: of print “U Ne Gua Nus” (The Bath Chair)—dated 1942
- #10. Photograph: of print “Ga Gun Sah” (Mask Making)—dated 1942
- #11. Photograph: of print “Untitled”—dated 1942
- #12. Photograph: of print “Ken Is Sha” (Delaware Superman)—dated 1943
- #13. Photograph: of print “Ca Nan Dai Gua” (Treaty of Canandaigua)—dated 1942
- 9 Correspondence (Not Dated):
- #1. Letter: handwritten from Dorsey to the AIHA regarding sale of paintings, includes projected budget
- #2. Letter: To Hatch from Dorsey, sent from US Army Air Force Base in Atlantic City, NJ
- #3. Letter: handwritten to Hatch from Dorsey
- #4. Memo: to Hatch from Dorsey on American Museum of Natural History stationary
- #5. Post Card: to Hatch from Dorsey, labeled Kents Hill, ME
- 10 Correspondence (1942)
- mainly between Dorsey and Hatch at AIHA, some letters between AIHA and Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, New York State Museum, US Dept. of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, various reservations including Akwesasne Mohawk Counselor Organization, and the Onondaga Reservation—both handwritten and typed
- 11 Correspondence (1943)
- letters between Hatch and Dorsey; from US Army Air Force Base where Dorsey was stationed,

- Museum of Modern Art, The American Federation of Arts—mainly concerning the traveling of the “Iroquois Games and Dances” exhibition
- 12 Correspondence (1944)  
 - between Hatch and many institutions requesting information about Dorsey’s work, including The Munson-Williams-Proctor-Institute in Utica, NY, The Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, War Department Theaters (Dorsey), Cayuga Museum of History and Art, State Teachers College at Cortland
- 13 Correspondence (1945-1946)  
 - “Previous Employer Card” from the War Dept. for Dorsey to AIHA, memo from the American Museum of Natural History from Dorsey to Hatch, letters regarding Dorsey’s desire to have “Indians at Work” journal sent to him, Dorsey inquiring about a Guggenheim fellowship, letter requesting exhibition for the New York State Historical Association
- 14 Correspondence (1948-1960)  
 - from education dept. at American Museum of Natural History regarding Dorsey’s work,/hiring, Buffalo Museum of Science, letter on “Dorsey Designed” stationary, correspondence regarding the artwork of young Tom Jr. (Dorsey’s son)
- 15 Miscellaneous  
 #1. Draft Card for Employer: to Hatch regarding Dorsey’s enlistment—dated April 1942  
 #2. Pamphlet: “Life and Legends of the Iroquois Indians; a catalogue of an exhibit of water colors painted by Ernest Smith”, printed by the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences—dated 1939  
 #3. Resume: of Dorsey—not dated  
 Slides:  
 - labeled “Tom Two Arrows”, of Iroquois Games and Dances prints—not dated