

**Florence Owens Thompson Papers**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2018**

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2017086192>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms018015>

Prepared by Amanda Loeb

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2018

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Florence Owens Thompson Papers

**Span Dates:** 1977-1995

**Bulk Dates:** (bulk 1983)

**ID No.:** MSS86192

**Creator:** Thompson, Florence Owens, 1903-1983

**Extent:** 475 items

**Extent:** 2 containers

**Extent:** 0.6 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2017086192>

**Summary:** Migrant worker and subject of "The Migrant Mother" photograph by Dorothea Lange. Correspondence, clippings, and printed material related to Thompson's illness and death in 1983.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Lange, Dorothea.

Thompson family.

Thompson, Florence Owens, 1903-1983--Death and burial.

Thompson, Florence Owens, 1903-1983--Family.

Thompson, Florence Owens, 1903-1983.

### Subjects

Depressions--1929--United States.

Migrant agricultural laborers--United States.

Photographs--Social aspects--United States.

### Places

United States--History--1901-1953.

### Occupations

Migrant workers.

## Provenance

The Florence Owens Thompson papers were purchased by the Library of Congress in 2017.

## Transfers

An aluminum cast portrait of the "Migrant Mother" image, which belonged to the Thompson family, has been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division, where it is identified as part of the Florence Owens Thompson Papers.

## Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Florence Owens Thompson in these papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

## Access and Restrictions

The papers of Florence Owens Thompson are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Florence Owens Thompson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

Florence Owens Thompson (1903-1983) was the subject of the iconic Great Depression-era photograph, "The Migrant Mother," by Farm Security Administration photographer Dorothea Lange. The photoshoot took place in March 1936 while Lange was documenting migratory farm workers in Nipomo, Calif. At the time, Thompson, her husband, and seven children were looking for field work in a pea-pickers camp. Thompson, a native of present-day Oklahoma, settled with her family in Modesto, Calif. following World War II. When Thompson fell ill and was hospitalized in 1983, her family appealed for financial assistance through an article in the *San Jose Mercury News*. The article and her story gained nation-wide attention, prompting people from around the world to write and send contributions to help with her medical care.

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of Florence Owens Thompson consist chiefly of notes, cards, and letters containing financial contributions to support her medical care at the end of her life. Contributions were solicited by her family in a *San Jose Mercury News* story in 1983. Some of the correspondents discuss the personal meaning of the "Migrant Mother" photograph in their lives. The collection also contains clippings regarding Thompson, the photograph, and her illness; family snapshots; funeral items; and printed material.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

## Container List

<b>Container</b>	<b>Contents</b>
BOX 1	Clippings, 1983 (2 folders) Correspondence, Aug.-Oct. 1983
BOX 1	"A-D"
BOX 1	"E-H"
BOX 1	"I-L"
BOX 1	"M-P"
BOX 1	"Q-T"
BOX 1	"U-Z"
BOX 1	Unidentified
BOX 2	Photocopies
BOX 2	Envelopes (2 folders)
BOX 2	Family photographs, 1981-2002 , undated
BOX 2	Funeral material, 1983
BOX 2	Printed material, 1977-1995