

# Guide to the Emery and Elvera Carlson Papers

RG 246



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2012

409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(203) 432-5301

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<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Yale Divinity Library  
409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(203) 432-5301  
divinity.library@yale.edu  
<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

**CALL NUMBER:** RG 246

**CREATOR:** Carlson, Emery W.

**TITLE:** Emery and Elvera Carlson Papers

**DATES:** 1928-1980

**BULK DATES:** 1940-1949

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 1 linear foot (2 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Correspondence, writings, and collected material document the work of Emery W. Carlson and Elvera Teed Carlson, Lutheran missionaries serving in China from 1940 to 1949. Emery Carlson was a medical doctor who worked at the Lutheran Hospital in Xuchang, Henan (Hsuehchang, Honan) province from 1941 to 1944. He was active in famine relief work 1942-1944 and in 1945 became an intelligence officer working for the Office of Strategic Services behind Japanese lines in Henan. After the war Carlson returned to the mission hospital but the family was forced to leave China in 1949 due to the Communist takeover.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.246>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.246>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Erleen Carlson Christensen, 2012

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Preferred Citation

Emery and Elvera Carlson Papers (RG 246), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

Emery W. and Elvera Teed Carlson were Swedish-American missionaries in China serving under the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America (later known as the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church.) Emery Carlson was a medical doctor at the Lutheran Hospital in Xuchang, Henan (Hsuehchang, Honan) province from 1941-1944. He was active in famine relief work 1942-1944 and in 1945 served as an intelligence officer for the Office of Strategic Services behind Japanese lines in Henan (Honan) province. He was allowed to return to his medical work after the war ended but the family was forced to flee when the Communists took control of the province in 1947-1948 and returned to the United States in 1949.

For more detailed biographical information see *In War and Famine : Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s* by Erleen Carlson Christensen.

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## Scope and Contents

These papers, which constitute a major portion of the source material used by Erleen Christensen in writing *In War and Famine : Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s*, tell the story of Swedish-American Lutheran missionaries serving in Henan province during a turbulent period in China history. The Sino-Japanese war, Nationalist Communist conflict, banditry, and famine due to crop failures and inflation were dominant forces during the Carlsons' relatively brief but intensive period of work in China.

Series I, Correspondence, is divided into Family and General Correspondence. The Family correspondence contains detailed letters written by the Carlsons to their extended family in the U.S., and well as letters written by Emery to his wife during their wartime separation. Daily life for the family and Emery's medical work are described, as well as the frequent moves and separations occasioned by political events. In the General correspondence section, circular letters written by the Carlsons and letters to/from their mission provide additional documentation, including regarding the American School Kikungshan. For additional documentation regarding the American School Kikungshan, a Lutheran school missionary children, see YDSL Record Group No. 164.

Series II, Writings, includes journals by Elvera and Emery as well as published articles related to the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church's work in China.

Series III, Biographical Documentation, includes newspaper clippings about the Carlsons as well as documentation of Emery's work for the OSS during World War II. Series IV, Collected Material, concludes the collection with material related to fellow missionaries, programs, brochures and photos.

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## Arrangement

- I. Correspondence, 1940-1949
- II. Writings, 1941-1980
- III. Biographical Documentation, 1942-1949
- IV. Collected Material, 1928-1970

## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1940-1949

#### Family correspondence

##### Extended family

These letters were written by Emery and Elvera Carlson to extended family members in the U.S.

b. 1, f. 1	Leaving U.S. and travel to China	1940 Aug-Sep
b. 1, f. 2	Arrival in China; studying Chinese in Beijing (Peiping)	1940 October
b. 1, f. 3	Evacuated to Henan (Honan) province to avoid Japanese troops	1940 November
b. 1, f. 4	Travel to Xuchang (Hsuchang), Henan (Honan); continuation of language study	1940 December
b. 1, f. 5	Incl. re. mission conference, daily life	1941 Jan-Feb
b. 1, f. 6	Descriptions of daily life of missionaries	1941 Mar
b. 1, f. 7	Incl. re. medical work of Emery W. Carlson (EWC)	1941 Apr
b. 1, f. 8	Descriptions of EWC's clinical work, daily life	1941 May
b. 1, f. 9	Incl. re. difficulty getting supplies, unsettled conditions; description of Chinese Postal Service	1941 Jun
b. 1, f. 10	Description of hospital care; language exams; Elvera T. Carlson (ETC) teaching English at girls' school	1941 Jul-Aug
b. 1, f. 11	EWC takes bicycle trip to Juchow and Loyang to check on medical work; threats from Japanese troops	1941 Sep-Dec
b. 1, f. 12	Family moves to Juchow in January; EWC only doctor at hospital; visits other stations; daughter Faith Louise born March 12.	1942 Jan-Jun
b. 1, f. 13	Rampant famine and inflation; EWC made chair of relief committee; girl babies being abandoned	1942 Jul-Dec
b. 1, f. 14	Family moves to Xuchang (Hsuchang); Emery only doctor in mission; much travel by bicycle, treating patients; better harvest brings some relief to famine	1943 January-December
b. 1, f. 15	Japanese invasion necessitates move west with dangerous journey; family settles in Chongqing (Chungking); son Jon Paul born July 10	1944 January-July
b. 1, f. 16	Waiting in Chongqing (Chungking); Emery Carlson takes family to India to await transport to U.S.	1944 August-December
b. 1, f. 17	Emery Carlson now civilian employee of U.S. Army, returns to Chengdu (Chengtu); Elvera Carlson and children go to U.S.	1945 January-March
b. 1, f. 18	Emery Carlson sets up dispensary in Xian (Sian), then Tantouchen, seeing 100 patients daily; when war ends, returns to Henan (Honan) to re-equip hospital	1946 March

## Family correspondence &gt; Extended family (continued)

b. 1, f. 19	Emery on furlough in U.S. with family, then family returns to China, stationed in Xuchang (Hsuehchang) after delays; threats from Communist troops	1947 March-December
b. 1, f. 20	Xuchang (Hsuehchang) attacked by Communist troops; families moved to Zhengzhou (Chengchow), then Hankou (Hankow), to await relocation; Emery Carlson travels to Kunming to explore establishing new work there	1948 January-February
b. 1, f. 21	Carlsons and two other families move to Kunming	1948 Mar-Jun
b. 1, f. 22	EWC doing clinical work in government camps for beggars and evangelistic work; son Mark Luther born August 26	1948 Jul-Dec
b. 1, f. 23	Difficult economic conditions; older daughter Erleen at school in Hong Kong where American School Kikungshan had been evacuated; EWC working at clinic of Municipal Hospital in Kunming; Carlsons return to U.S. where EWC begins medical practice in Nebraska	1949 Jan-Jun
<p>Emery to Elvera</p> <p>These letters were written by Emery Carlson to his wife when they were separated from each other during wartime.</p>		
b. 1, f. 24	Emery Carlson serving as civilian employee of U.S. Army during war; leaves family in India and returns to Chengdu (Chengtu)	1945 January-February
b. 1, f. 25	Descriptions of Emery Carlson's daily life in Chengdu (Chengtu)	1945 March
b. 1, f. 26	Incl. re. EWC socializing with other missionaries, some medical work; family has arrived back in U.S.	1945 Apr-Jun
b. 1, f. 27	EWC seeing about 100 patients daily in Tantouchen	1945 Jul
b. 2, f. 28	War ends; Emery Carlson considering plans for future; decides to return to Xuchang (Hsuehchang) via Chongqing (Chungking)	1945 August-September
b. 2, f. 29	Emery in Xuchang (Hsuehchang); Japanese remaining on mission property, which is in bad condition; Japanese officer lends Emery truck for trip to Sian to get hospital equipment	1945 October
b. 2, f. 30	Cleaning up hospital in Xuchang (Hsuehchang); reorganizing work; many obstacles; longs to be with family	1945 November-December
b. 2, f. 31	EWC on United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) committee; description of medical work	1946 Jan-Feb
b. 2, f. 32	EWC begins trip home to U.S.; waiting for transport in Shanghai; on freighter diverted to Guam	1946 Mar
General Correspondence		1940-1949
b. 2, f. 33	Circular letters from Carlsons	1945 Oct- 1948 Sep
b. 2, f. 34	Augustana Board of Foreign Missions: letters to extended family regarding Carlsons	1940 Dec- 1949 Jun
b. 2, f. 35	Augustana Board of Foreign Missions: regarding financial matters	1946 May- 1949 Jun

## General Correspondence (continued)

b. 2, f. 36	Augustana Board of Foreign Missions: bulletins regarding Carlsons and other missionaries	1943-1948
b. 2, f. 37	American School Kikungshan: letters regarding school board matters and regarding daughter Erleen	1949 Jan-Mar
b. 2, f. 38	Letters from Carlsons to/from others, including Alice Karel, Dr. Benson, Arthur Kennedy, Dr. Shih	1945 Mar-1949 May
b. 2, f. 39	Letters of others, including extended family members and other missionaries	1942 Oct- 1949 Feb

**Series II: Writings, 1940-1980**

b. 2, f. 40	Published articles, including "Through No Man's Land", "The Bible in China", "A Tour of the Augustana Synod Mission Field in Central Honan"	1941-1947
b. 2, f. 41	Journal of Elvera Carlson: "Impressions of My Work in China"	1940 Aug-1943 Aug
b. 2, f. 42	Journal of Emery Carlson: "The Work in Yunnan Province, China"	194 Aug-1980 Mar



**Series III: Biographical Documentation, 1942-1949**

b. 2, f. 43	Newspaper clippings regarding the Carlsons	192 Mar – 1948 Oct
b. 2, f. 44	Office of Strategic Services (OSS) documents, including contract of employment, certificate	1945 Mar-Oct
b. 2, f. 45	Travel documents, innocations,etc.	1947 Jun - 1949 Jun

**Series IV: Collected Material, 1928-1970**

b. 2, f. 46	Prayer booklet, magazine articles, clippings, photos regarding other missionaries	1928-1970
b. 2, f. 47	Miscellaneous items, including program, booklets	n.d.

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## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Disaster relief -- China  
Lutheran Church -- Missions -- China

### **Names**

Carlson, Elvera Teed  
Carlson, Emery W.

### **Corporate Body**

Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church --  
Missions -- China