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Yale Divinity Library

# Guide to the Carl and Elisabeth Wahl Papers

RG 192



Compiled by Martha Lund Smalley

2004

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 192

**CREATOR:** Wahl, Carl

**TITLE:** Carl and Elisabeth Wahl Papers

**DATES:** 1908-1944

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 4 linear feet (8 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Regular and substantive correspondence as well as writings and biographical information provide an excellent picture of the lives and work of the Wahls. Carl and Elisabeth Wahl served as missionaries in China under the Evangelical Church. They were first stationed in Shenzhou (Shenchow) and later in Tongren, Guizhou (Tungjen, Kweichow Province) (now Guizhou) at the Ming Teh Boys' School. Following Carl's untimely death in 1934, Elisabeth returned to China as a teaching missionary until forced to leave by the Sino-Japanese war.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.192>

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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.192>.

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 Trudie Wahl Palm, 2004

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Preferred Citation

Carl and Elisabeth Wahl Papers (RG 192), Special Collections, Yale Divinity Library.

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## Processing Information

Place names were modernized in the description, with the name originally used in the collection material or in an older version of the finding aid in parenthesis: e.g. "Beijing (Peking)" or "Benin (Dahomey)".

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## Biographical / Historical

Carl B. Wahl was born on March 19, 1886 in Paton, Iowa, the youngest of twelve children of Christian and Anna Gertrude Wahl. He grew up in a devout home and made his profession of faith in God at age ten in the Paton Evangelical Church. After attending public schools in Paton, he worked at various jobs until 1909 when he entered North Western College (now North Central College) in Naperville, IL, an institution of the Evangelical Church. He was active in sports, debate, publications, and the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. During the summer of 1910 he attended a YMCA conference and heard an appeal for workers in China. After college, Carl was a teacher and superintendent of public schools in Sheffield, Iowa. In 1913 he entered the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Naperville, IL and received his B.D. in 1916. On Nov. 17, 1915 his appointment to China was issued by the Mission Board of the Evangelical Church, and he left for China on September 7, 1916. After a year of language study in Nanking, Carl was assigned to do evangelistic work in Shenchow, where he met Wilhelmina Elisabeth Schempp, a German missionary of the Evangelical Church.

Wilhelmina Elisabeth Schempp was born on August 3, 1884 in Eisenach, Germany, the third of ten children of Pastor Johannes and Fredericke Schempp. Her father was a parish pastor who later became president of the Evangelical seminary in Reutlingen. Elisabeth felt an early call to missions. She went to the United States in 1908 for a year of language study. In 1909 she went to Shenchow in the interior of China and became a teacher.

Carl and Elisabeth were married on July 29, 1919 in Hankou (Hankow). In the fall of that year they moved to Tongren, Guizhou (Tungjen, Kweichow Province) to establish the Ming Teh Boys' School. Carl supervised the building of the school and their new home. Carl and Elisabeth were the parents of four children: John (1920); Margaret Elisabeth (1923), Anna Gertrude (1925), all born in Tongren (Tungjen), and Helen Louise (1927) born on furlough in Reutlingen, Germany.

The Wahls experienced a number of temporary evacuations due to disruptions caused by thieves, floods, and political events. During one Communist threat in September 1934 the family left Kweichow province by river boat. Carl had been ill for sometime with intestinal problems and during the slow river boat trip his condition worsened. On November 24, 1934 he was admitted to Hunan Yale hospital and emergency surgery was performed, but he died on December 3 at the age of 48.

Elisabeth and the children traveled to Germany in 1935 and then to the United States. Elisabeth secured the approval of the Evangelical Church Mission Board to return to China as a teaching missionary. The two younger children accompanied her while the others lived with relatives in the United States. In 1941 the younger children were evacuated to the U.S. but Elisabeth carried on her ministry until the Japanese invasion until forced to escape by perilous journey to Mumbai (Bombay), India. She eventually settled in Naperville, IL where she continued to be active in the church. Elisabeth died at age 93 on December 18, 1977.

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## Scope and Contents

The Correspondence of Series I provides very substantive description of the Wahls' life and work in the southwest interior section of China from 1910 to 1944. The series is divided into several sub-series, including Carl's letters to his extended family, Elisabeth's letters to her extended family, and Elisabeth's letters to her children when she returned to China from 1937 to 1944. For all the letters to the extended

family, the originals (in English or German) and English typed transcripts are available. The letters provide extensive detail about missionary life, the raising of children in China, political disruptions, the effects of famine, religious activities, and the development and operation of the Ming Teh Boys' School. Circular letters and reports provide a succinct overview of the Wahls' work and a published volume, titled "Dear Home Folks" is also available.

Series II, Writings, includes writings of Carl regarding experiences in China, as well as a "History of the China Mission of the United Evangelical Church" written by Elisabeth in 1941. The Evangelical Association of North America (1859-1922) merged with the United Evangelical Church (1892-1922) to form the Evangelical Church (1923-1941). The Evangelical Church merged with the United Brethren Church in 1946, forming the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Series III, Collected Materials, includes news clippings, a scrapbook, material related to the Ming Teh Boys' School, and a wooden statue. Series IV, Biographical Documentation, includes obituaries and correspondence related to Carl Wahl's untimely death, as well as other biographical material. The Photographs of Series V are primarily of Shenzhou (Shen Chow) and Tongren (Tungjen), Guizhou (Kweichow) province.

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## Arrangement

- I. Correspondence
- II. Writings
- III. Collected Materials
- IV. Biographical Documentation
- V. Photographs

## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence

Carl Wahl to Family		
b. 1, f. 1	Originals	1908 Mar, 1916 Jul
b. 1, f. 2-19	Originals and typed transcripts	1916 Aug - 1920 Nov
b. 2, f. 20-34	Originals and typed transcripts	1921 Jan-1926 Nov
b. 3, f. 35-51	Originals and typed transcripts	1927 Jan-1934 Nov
Carl Wahl to others		
b. 4, f. 52-53	To co-workers and circulars	1928-1934
b. 4, f. 54	To Brunemeiers, Beck, Dubs, Graner, etc	1924-34
Elisabeth Wahl to Family		
b. 4, f. 55-68	German originals - English Transcripts	1909 Dec - 1935 Jul
Elisabeth to Carl		
b. 5, f. 69	Elisabeth to Carl	1929 Jul, 1932 Sep
Elisabeth to Carl's Family and others		
b. 5, f. 69-70	Elisabeth to Carl's Family and others	1928 Jun, 1936 Oct, 1938 Jun, 1944 Oct
Circular and edited letters		
b. 5, f. 71	Circular letters and reports	May 1931, 1939- 40
b. 5, f. 72	"Dear Home Folks" - published volume of Carl's and Elisabeth's letters	
Elisabeth's letters to Children (from China)		
b. 5, f. 73-78	Elisabeth to children	1937 Mar - 1944 Mar
Letters of others		
b. 5, f. 79	Letters of "John"	1932
b. 5, f. 80	Others to Wahls, A-G, incl. Brunemeier, Dubs, Graner	
b. 5, f. 81	Others to Wahls, H-Y, incl. Renniger, Schmalzreid	

**Series II: Writings**

## Writings of Carl

b. 5, f. 82	"The unhappy fate of Banana Valley"; "Bitter Herbs and other things"; "George and the Dragon"; "A Genuine Robber Experience"; "On the Way Home"	1925-1927
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b. 5, f. 83	Magazine Articles: "News from Tungjen, China"; "Our general interests"; "Some members of our Tungjen Church"	1924-1931
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b. 5, f. 84	Letters to <i>Paton Portrait</i> (newspaper)	1916
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## Writings of Elisabeth

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b. 6, f. 85	"History of the China Mission of the United Evangelical Church"	1941
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## Series III: Collected Materials

b. 6, f. 86	Misc. news articles; Report of Ming Teh Boys School; Insurance policy; notebooks misc. items; snapshots
b. 6, f. 87	Sketch of Elisabeth's life - scrapbook
b. 6, f. 88	Misc. - news clippings; lists---
b. 8, f. 95	Wooden statue of Chinese god



## Series IV: Biographical Documentation

b. 6, f. 89	Obituaries and tributes
b. 6, f. 90	Correspondence re. death of Carl
b. 6, f. 91	Funeral programs
b. 6, f. 92	Official papers (consular)
b. 6, f. 93	Marriage certificate and other forms

## Series V: Photographs

b. 7, f. 94      Photos of China - Shenzhou (Shenchow), Tongren (Tungjen)

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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**

Missionaries  
Missions -- China

### **Names**

Wahl, Carl  
Wahl, Wilhelmina Elisabeth

### **Corporate Body**

United Evangelical Church -- Missions

### **Contributors**

Wahl, Carl  
Wahl, Wilhelmina Elisabeth