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Yale Divinity Library

# Guide to the Howard Olson Family Papers

RG 238



Martha Lund Smalley

2011

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

[divinity.library@yale.edu](mailto:divinity.library@yale.edu)

<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 238

**CREATOR:** Olson, Howard S.

**TITLE:** Howard Olson Family Papers

**DATES:** 1943-2010

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 1.5 linear feet (4 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Correspondence, writings, and collected material document the life and work of Howard and Louise Olson and their family. The Olsons were Lutheran missionaries and educators in Tanzania from 1946 to 1988. Howard Olson was instrumental in translating the New Testament into the Rimi language and had a particular interest in African music and hymns.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.238>

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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.238>.

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

b.        box  
f.        folder  
■■■■    item barcode

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of the Olson family, 2011

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Preferred Citation

Howard Olson Family Papers (RG 238), Special Collections, Yale Divinity Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

Howard S. Olson was born July 18, 1922 and died July 1, 2010. He received a B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College, an M.Div. from Augustana Seminary, and a Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary (1965). In 1946 Howard married Louise Anderson, daughter of George and Annette Anderson, who were missionaries serving under the Augustana Lutheran Mission in Tanzania (Tanganyika Territory) 1924-1954. Howard and Louise had four children: Howard, Sharon, Timothy, and Linda.

Howard and his wife Louise served as Lutheran missionaries in Tanzania from 1946 to 1988, collaborating in parish work, educational work, and in the study of African music. During the first half of their career Howard worked mainly as a parish pastor, builder, Bible translator, language teacher and administrator. He analyzed and reduced to writing a dialect of the Rimi language and assisted in completing the first draft translation of the New Testament in Rimi.

Howard and Louise both taught at Makumira Seminary, the largest Lutheran seminary in Africa, for twenty-four years. Howard was Director of Music Research and served from time to time as President, Academic Dean, chair of the Biblical Department, chaplain, and editor of *The Africa Theological Journal*. Louise taught a variety of subjects to the theological students and their wives, was active in the seminary choir, and worked in conjunction with her husband in notating ethnic music.

Howard also taught at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and Wartburg Theological Seminary. He published works in the fields of theology, ethnomusicology and linguistics in English, Kiswahili and Kiriimi. Major publications include *The Phonology and Morphology of the Rimi Language*, *Jifunze Kiyunani* (textbook for teaching Koine Greek in Swahili), *Tumshangilie Mungu* (six editions of 150 ethnic hymns in Swahili with translation of some of them in English, German, and French), *Lead Us, Lord* and *Set Free* (compilations of African ethnic hymns published by Augsburg Fortress). Hymns by Olson can be found in many Evangelical Lutheran Church in America hymnals. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Olsons gave presentations and taught at various conferences and lay courses related to Africa and African music.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection provides valuable documentation of the life and work of Howard and Louise Olson as Lutheran missionaries in Tanzania, including their educational work, research related to African music and languages, and the experience of raising children in a missionary setting. The family correspondence from the 1940s and 1950s provides more detailed information about their work in Tanzania. There is no correspondence from the 1960s and the correspondence beginning with the 1970s is primarily with the Olson's children, focusing more on their lives, but with some mention of the Olsons' activities in Tanzania.

The Writings of Series II primarily relate to Howard Olson's work in the areas of linguistics and African music. Additional documentation regarding African music and hymns is found in Series III. The documentation of Conferences and Lay Courses in Series IV includes the Olsons' teaching curricula related to Africa and African music as well as records from reunions of Lutheran missionaries to East Africa. Series V, Collected Material, includes photocopies of historical documents related to the Lutheran mission in Tanzania and two audiotapes related to African languages. The collection concludes with Series VII, Biographical Documentation.

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## Arrangement

- I. Correspondence, 1945-1988, n.d.
- II. Writings, 1955-2004

III. African Music Documentation

IV. Conferences and Lay Courses, 1994-2004, n.d.

V. Collected Material, 1943-1991, n.d.

VI. Biographical Documentation, 2010, n.d.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1945-1988, n.d.

Family correspondence		
b. 1, f. 1	HSO to parents incl. re. beginning mission work in Tanzania; working with Louise's parents; learning Swahili; moving to another station; Louise pregnancy and death of child at birth.	1945 Nov - 1949 Apr
b. 1, f. 2	Incl. re. traveling, hunting, famine problem, electricity installed at mission; HSO elected secretary of mission; sewing classes, translation work for hymnal completed	1949 May - 1950 Jan
b. 1, f. 3	Incl. re. collecting native melodies and words - samples from five tribes; malaria persists	1950 Feb-Apr
b. 1, f. 4	Incl. re. more hymns translated; Louise's parents return to field; refresher course for 130 teachers; HSO delegate to Christian Council of Tanganyika; HSO continues translations to Swahili	1950 May-Dec
b. 1, f. 5	Incl. re. HSO working on Turu grammar, catechism, and hymnal; death of fellow missionary Twilah Peterson; furlough - studying at Hartford Seminary and speaking in churches	1951 Jan-Nov
b. 1, f. 6	Incl. re. continuing studies at Hartford; son Howie Joe adopted; return to MN; deputation work in churches; return to Africa; 90 adults baptized	1952 Jan - 1954 Dec
b. 1, f. 7	Incl. re. building church at Wilakina; HSO continues Turu translation; literacy program planned; HSO given 6 months for full time language research; motion passed that no African pastor or teacher can belong to a political party; literacy work in Kinampanda; furlough	1955 Feb - 1957 Jul
b. 1, f. 8	HSO and LAO now teaching at Lutheran Theological College in Makumira; son Howie in MN attending school	1970 Aug-1973 May
b. 1, f. 9	Letters primarily to/from Howie in U.S.	1973 Jul-1974 Feb
b. 1, f. 10	HSO, and children Tim and Linda return to Tanzania; Louise and Sharon follow later; more letters to/from Howie	1975 Feb-Dec
b. 1, f. 11	HSO Academic Dean at seminary in Makumira; more letters to/from Howie	1976 Feb-Jun
b. 1, f. 12	Augsburg Press to publish booklet of 20 African songs in English; HSO invited to teach at Pacific Lutheran Seminary in 1977	1976 Jul - 1977 May
b. 1, f. 13-16	Primarily letters to/from children	1978-1981
b. 1, f. 17	HSO and LAO on furlough for six months doing deputation work; HSO becomes editor of Africa Theological Journal	1982
b. 1, f. 18	Letters to children re. life at Makumira; HSO goes to conference in Uganda	1983 Jan-Apr
b. 1, f. 19-20	Incl. re. HSO advisor to ELCT Hymnal Committee; trip to U.S.; return to Makumira	1984

## Family correspondence (continued)

b. 1, f. 21	Incl. re. publication of Africa Theological Journal; HSO translating Zulu hymns into Swahili; teaching students about African music; and re. children's activities	1985
b. 1, f. 22-23	Incl. HSO teaching re. African music and culture, publications; trip to Sweden for International Ecumencial Hymnological Research Conference	1986-1987
b. 1, f. 24	Incl. re. plans to retire from work in Tanzania; HSO offered interim job at Wartburg Seminary; and undated and fragmentary family correspondence	1988, n.d.
Circular Letters		
b. 1, f. 25	Circular letters describing work of the Olsons	1947-1950, 1986-1987
General correspondence		
b. 1, f. 26	Incl. letters to/from Desmond Cole, Dr. Henry A. Gleason, Jr, Herb Haferman, Dr. J. Maurice Honifel re. linguistics and HSO dissertation	
b. 1, f. 27	Incl. letters to/from Alpha Jaques, Marguerite Jellicoe, HSO to mission members, Jim Peters, Dean and Elaine Peterson, Bill Samarin, Carl Sandgren, Dr. Earl Stevick	

**Series II: Writings, 1955-2004**

b. 2, f. 28	Re. linguistics: Report of the Turu Translation Committee; progress reports on linguistic analysis; "An Introduction to Rimi Cosmogony"; Rimi language study	1955-1960
b. 2, f. 29	"African Traditional Music and Its Use in Worship"	1963
b. 2, f. 30	"Once in a Lifetime" - re. foot safari in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area; "Kibo Kwaheri" - re. climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro	1985, 1988
b. 2, f. 31	"A Descriptive Analysis of Rimi" - HSO Ph.D. dissertation	1964
b. 2, f. 32-33	ELCA Writers Workshop at Concordia College, MN; HSO manuscripts from workshop	1995
b. 2, f. 34	ELCA Writers Workshop at Concordia University, IL	2003



## Series III: African Music Documentation

b. 3, f. 35	African hymn books
b. 3, f. 36	"Tumshangilie Mungu" - African hymn manuscript
b. 3, f. 37-40	Ethnic hymns
b. 3, f. 41	"Set Free" - original manuscript

**Series IV: Conferences and Lay Courses**

b. 3, f. 42	Women's Retreat, Paisley, FL	1994 Mar
b. 3, f. 43	East Africa Missionary Reunion: Concordia College, MN	1994 Jul
b. 3, f. 44	Sheridan Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE: "Listening to Africa"	1995 Mar
b. 3, f. 45	Community Church College: "Africa My Tutor"	1996
b. 3, f. 46	East Africa Missionary Reunion: Gustavus Adolphus College, MN	1997 Jun
b. 3, f. 47	Leadership Conference, Florida Synod	1997 Sep
b. 3, f. 48-49	Lutheran Lay School of Theology, Pinellas Park, FL: "Africa My Tutor"	1997
b. 4, f. 50	Lutheran Lay School of Theology curriculum information	1999
b. 4, f. 51	East Africa Missionary Reunion: Bethany College, KS	2000
b. 4, f. 52	Esst Africa Missionary Reunion: Concordia College, MN	2003
b. 4, f. 53	Luther Hostel	2004
b. 4, f. 54	"Singing Our Theology" - course outline	n.d.

**Series V: Collected Material, 1943-1991, n.d.**

b. 4, f. 55	Reports, annual conference minutes re. work of Augustana Lutheran Mission work in Tanzania (Tanganyika) (copies from ELCA archives)	1943-1954
b. 4, f. 56	Report re. LCA World Missions; information about designated giving; report re. the history of the Africa Theological Journal	1966-1991
b. 4, f. 57	Christmas music (American)	
b. 4, f. 58	Booklet of Rimi proverbs; miscellaneous printed material	
b. 4, f. 59	Audio tapes (reel to reel) re: Rimi language	
b. 4, f. 59, ■■■ 39002137387784	Spoken Rimi, Lessons 1-3 <i>1 Audiotape Reel</i>	1961 August 25
b. 4, f. 59, ■■■ 39002137387792	A Wind on Wollensak <i>1 Audiotape Reel</i> 1. Greetings between Zakira S?ma and M. Kaeli Luteri 2. Greetings between Nyá Sáligg? and Nyá Eefétwa 3. Greetings between Jumanne Hema and Asumani Maj?langa	1961 June 20

**Series VI: Biographical Documentation, 2010, n.d.**

b. 4, f. 60

Biographical sketches, obituaries for HSO, genealogical information

2010, 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**

Hymns, African  
Hymns, Swahili

### **Geographic Names**

Singida District (Tanzania) -- Languages

### **Names**

Olson, Howard S.

### **Corporate Body**

Lutheran Theological College (Makumira,  
Tanzania)