

Frans August Larson Family Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2021
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Collection Summary

Title: Frans August Larson Family Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1864-2021

Bulk Dates: 1900-1980

ID No.: MSS86420

Creator: Larson, Frans August, 1870-1957

Extent: 6,700 items

Extent: 19 containers plus 2 oversize

Extent: 7.7 linear feet

Extent: 21 digital files (322.95 MB)

Language: Collection material in English, with some Swedish and Mongolian

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2021086420>

Summary: Frans August Larson, Swedish-born missionary, expedition guide, entrepreneur, and diplomatic advisor in Mongolia; his wife, Mary Rodgers Larson, American missionary in northern China; their children, especially Mary Larson Walker and her husband, writer C. Lester Walker. Correspondence, photographs, writings, and other records relating to family life and activities during their time in Mongolia and Kalgan (now known as Zhangjiakou), China, 1893-1939, and subsequent years in the United States, primarily in Alabama, California, and Connecticut, and on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.

Acquisition Information

The papers of the Frans August Larson family were given to the Library of Congress by Henry Hart and Virginia Hart in 2021. An addition was given by them in 2022.

Processing History

The papers of the Frans August Larson family were arranged and described by Karen Linn Femia in 2021. Prior to donating the collection, the donors created small explanatory notes. These have been kept in place, often replaced with a photocopy. Additionally, the donors, descendants of the Larson family, assisted with information for the biographical notes. The 2023 Addition was processed and the finding aid revised by Rachel Telford in 2023.

Digital files were received as part of the Frans August Larson Family Papers on an optical disc, which was assigned a unique digital ID number. Use the digital ID number to request access copies of the files associated with the media. A description of the standard processes taken on all born digital records can be found in the Processing History Note: Born Digital Collection Material at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.digital>.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of the Frans August Larson family in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of the Frans August Larson family are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Technical Requirements

Digital files were created in a Windows operating system, version unknown. The content consists of moving image files in .VOB format.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or digital ID number, Frans August Larson Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Notes

Frans August Larson

Date	Event
1870, Apr. 2	Born, Hällby Estate, Tillberga, Västmanland, Sweden
1890	Moved to Stockholm, Sweden, where he worked as a carpenter
1893	First missionary to Mongolia for the Christian and Missionary Alliance after a six-week missionary training in England
1897	Married Mary Rodgers (died 1947), an American missionary working in Kalgan (now known as Zhangjiakou), China, a town on the border of Mongolia along the Great Wall. They made their home in Kalgan while he traveled often in Mongolia.
1900	Leader of a group of Christian missionaries escaping the violence of the Boxer Rebellion. Larson led them through a gate in the Great Wall and across the Gobi Desert to Urga (now known as Ulaanbaator), Mongolia. While the group of missionaries took the railroad from Urga to Sweden, Larson, with his wife and children, remained in Kiachta, Siberia to work as a foreman and an interpreter for Mongolian workers in a French-Russian gold mine.
1901	Larson family relocated first to Sweden and then to Albany, N.Y.
1901-1902	Guide and interpreter for Swedish railroad engineers in Siberia and Mongolia
1902	Expedition guide for C. W. Campbell, British consul in Shanghai, China Established "Tabo-ol," his horse ranch north of Kalgan, on the Mongolia steppes Family moved back to Kalgan, China
1902-1913	Distributed Bibles in Mongolia for British and Foreign Bible Society.
1912-1914	Advisor to President Yuan Shikai of the Republic of China on Mongolian issues, brokered peace deal between Mongolia and China
1914	Business agent, Andersson, Mayer & Co.
1920	Named a duke of Mongolia by Bogdo Gegen, the Living Buddha, the ruler (khan) of Mongolia
1922	Started F.A. Larson and Company, a trade company with offices in Kalgan, China, and Urga, Mongolia
1923	Expedition guide for Roy Chapman Andrews, paleontologist, American Museum of Natural History, hunting dinosaur remains in Gobi Desert
1927	Expedition guide for Sven Anders Hedin, Swedish geographer and travel writer, in Mongolia
1929	Traveled to Sweden Published <i>Mongoliet och mitt liv bland mongolerna</i> . Stockholm: Bonnier
1930	Published <i>Larson, Duke of Mongolia</i> . Boston: Little, Brown and Company
1937-1939	Advisor to Chiang Kai-shek on northern China and Mongolia providing information on Japanese military activities
1939	Fled Mongolia after Japanese bomber planes destroyed the Buddhist temple where he lived; moved to California to be near his wife and several adult children Mink farmer in Sweden, financial failure Purchased farm in Alabama to raise chickens where his wife joined him

1943	Moved to California
1950-1951	Traveled to Sweden
1951-1957	Lived part of each year with children in California and summers on Vancouver Island with Swedish friends, the Swahn family
1957, Dec. 19	Died, Vista, Calif.
2007	Publication of <i>The Memoir of Frans August Larson</i> . Bloomington, Ind.: The Mongolia Society

Mary Rodgers Larson

Date	Event
1869, Aug. 24	Born, Albany, N. Y.
1891	Student, Northfield Bible Training School, Northfield, Mass., Jan.-Apr.
1891-1893	Evangelist, Vermont Domestic Missionary Society
1894-1897	Missionary, Christian and Missionary Alliance in Peking (now known as Beijing), China
1897-1939	Missionary, Mongolia and Kalgan, China
1897	Married Frans August Larson, Beijing, China
1900	Family fled Boxer Rebellion in China through Mongolia, Russia, Sweden and to the United States
1901-1902	Lived with her parents in Albany, N.Y., along with her two children
1902-1930	Larson family returned to Kalgan, China, spending summers in Mongolia.
1930-1939	Traveled several times between China and California where she had adult children
1939-1943	Joined her husband in Alabama where they ran a chicken farm; volunteered with local churches; developed severe dementia
1943	Moved to California to be near adult children
1947, July 24	Died, Long Beach, Calif.

Note: Some biographical information for Mary Rodgers Larson is from the Northfield Mount Hermon Archives; Northfield Bible Training School--Student files. The Library of Congress thanks archivist Peter H. Weis for his assistance.

Children of Frans August Larson and Mary Rodgers Larson

- Mary Louise Larson Walker (1898-1991)
- Katherine (Anna) Larson Barnes(1900-1983)
- Frans August (Augie) Larson, Jr. (1903-1970)
- John Albert (Al) Larson (1906-1978)
- James Rodgers Larson (1907-2007)
- Margaret Larson Pressey (1911-1997)

Mary Louise Larson Walker

Date	Event
1898, Apr. 5	Born, Kalgan, China
1900	Family fled Boxer Rebellion in China through Mongolia, Russia, Sweden and to the United States
1901-1902	Lived with maternal grandparents in Albany, N.Y., along with mother and sister
1902-1917	Larson family returned to Kalgan, China, spending summers in Mongolia
circa 1906-circa 1916	Student, The Chefoo School, Chefoo (now known as Yantai), Shandong Province, China
1917	Moved to California to live with her aunt
1918	Graduate, Pasadena High School, California
1918-1921	Nursing student, Rochester General Hospital, Rochester, N.Y.
1922-1923	Registered nurse and private-duty nurse, California
1924-1926	Nurse, Peking Union Hospital, Beijing, China
1926-1927	Chief of nurses, Lutto Hospital, Tungchou (now known as Tongzhou), China
1927	Married Charles Lester Walker (died 1990)
1927	Returned to the United States, moving between New York and Massachusetts
1928	Birth of daughter, Virginia
1934	Naturalized as a U.S. citizen

1938	Traveled to California and lived with brothers and sisters for a year, then returned to New York
1941	Walker family moved to Cornwall, Conn.
1944	Nurse, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Md., summer, then returned to Cornwall, Conn.
circa 1986-1991	Alzheimer's patient, Geer Memorial Health Center, North Canaan, Conn.
1991, June 23	Died, North Canaan, Conn.

Charles Lester Walker

Date	Event
1901, July 24	Born, Chelsea, Mass.
1920	Graduate, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N.H.
1924	Graduate, Yale University
1924-1926	English teacher, Yale-in-China, Changsha, China
1927	Married Mary Larson
1928	Birth of daughter, Virginia
1928-1929	Employee, John Price Jones Corp.
1930-1931	Employee, Book of the Month Club
1932-1937	Moved to Winchester, Mass. to work in his father's business
1938-1948	Employee, <i>The Commentator</i> (magazine)
1940	War correspondent in China, <i>Harper's</i> magazine
circa 1940-circa 1988	Freelance writer, articles in <i>American Mercury</i> , <i>Atlantic</i> , <i>Collier's</i> , <i>Harper's</i> , <i>New Yorker</i> , and others
1990, Aug. 9	Died, Cornwall, Conn.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of the Frans August Larson family span the years 1864-2021, with the bulk of the material dating from 1900 to 1980. The papers document the lives of a missionary family during their many years (1893-1939) in Mongolia and Kalgan (now known as Zhangjiakou), northern China, on the border of Mongolia, as well as their later lives in the United States. The papers are in English with occasional items in Swedish or Mongolian.

At the heart of the collection are the papers of Frans August Larson, Swedish-born missionary, expedition guide, entrepreneur, diplomatic advisor in Mongolia, and author of *Larson, Duke of Mongolia*. Larson's file includes drafts of his posthumously published memoir and of an unpublished book about Mongolia, both written in the 1940s. The largest correspondence file in the collection is his letters written to his daughter, Mary, beginning when she left China to attend high school in California and continuing until his final days when he was living in California and she in Connecticut. The letters document family life, missionary activities, life in Mongolia, social occasions with friends, his work with expeditions and business concerns, and world events as they unfolded in China and Mongolia and the part that he played. The majority of the letters to his daughter, however, were written during his later years while living in Alabama, California, and British Columbia, Canada. His file also includes material documenting his art collecting of Ordos bronzes and his work with art dealers. Additional material about Frans August Larson is found throughout the papers. The 2023 Addition includes a family history and genealogy file that consists of a family tree and correspondence between descendants regarding Larson's life and with journalist Axel Odelberg, who wrote a biography of Larson. Additional material includes correspondence from Larson to his daughter Mary and to his granddaughter Virginia, detailing news of the family and his daily life, and photographs of Larson in Mongolia, in the United States with family, and of his home in Sweden.

The letters of Mary Rodgers Larson include the oldest correspondence in the papers. Mary Rodgers was an American missionary in China from Albany, New York, who married the Swedish missionary Frans August Larson. Her earliest letters were written to Rodgers family members while she was a student at Northfield Bible Training School in Massachusetts and while doing mission work in Vermont, a time when she was contemplating life as a foreign missionary. Letters to her brother, James Rodgers, and his wife Anna Rodgers, missionaries in Brazil and later in the Philippines, date from her time as a student and when she was serving in Vermont as an "evangelist." Letters to her mother, Mary Rodgers, document her early missionary years in China and Mongolia. Subsequent letters from Mary Rodgers Larson were written

to her daughter, Mary Larson Walker. The 2023 Addition includes additional correspondence from Mary Rodgers Larson to her daughter, Mary Larson Walker, and to her granddaughter, Virginia Walker Hart, concerning news of the family, daily life, her birthday and gifts. Also included is correspondence, exchanged by Mary Rodgers Larson's husband and daughter, concerning her health and plans for her care.

Material relating to Mary Larson Walker can largely be found in the 2023 Addition and includes correspondence with her husband, C. Lester Walker, prior to their marriage, friends and former classmates at the Chefoo School, and her mother. Topics of the letters include her daily life, travel between the United States and China, the growth and development of her daughter, and gifts received. The file for Mary Larson Walker also contains documentation of her nursing career, including correspondence, photographs and a scrapbook dating from her time as a nursing student at Rochester General Hospital, and records of her marriage and immigration and naturalization in the United States.

Another large portion of the family papers is the file for C. Lester Walker, husband of Mary Larson Walker. They met in China while he was teaching for the Yale-in-China program and she was working as a nurse for a hospital in Beijing, China. Walker later returned to China as a war correspondent during World War II. His file contains some correspondence but is primarily composed of drafts of writings dating from the 1940s to the 1980s. The writings kept in these papers focus on China-related topics, both fiction and nonfiction. The 2023 Addition includes additional material dating from his time as a war correspondent, including photographs and correspondence with various members of his family relating details of his work, daily life, travel, the end of the war, and censorship. Also included in the 2023 Addition are photographs of his childhood and early adulthood, including at Camp Durrell, in Friendship, Maine, Phillips Exeter Academy and Yale University, and his early life and wedding in China. Images of his later life and family include portraits and photographs of his siblings and extended family, and of trips to Capri, Italy, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, Rhodes, Greece, Nova Scotia, Canada, and Hawaii. Also present is biographical information, correspondence and documentation relating to his attempts to secure a commission in the United States military in 1943, and correspondence with his father, Charles Arthur Walker, his mother, Ada Whitmore Walker, and with his wife, Mary Larson Walker, relating details of his daily life, travel, health, marriage, finances, and business dealings.

Photographs in the papers are primarily in the photographs file and in the photograph albums, but also can be found in other folders as attachments. The photographs cover the entire date range of the family papers and include family portraits, including extended members of the Rodgers family, and images from Sweden, the United States, Canada, China, and of Mongolia, where the photograph collection is particularly strong. Frans August Larson served as expedition guide in Mongolia for the American naturalist and explorer Roy Chapman Andrews (the 1923 expedition that discovered dinosaur eggs and fossils) and for the Swedish geographer and travel writer Sven Anders Hedin (in 1927). Photographs from both expeditions are present, but the Hedin expedition is especially well-documented. Other photographs from Mongolia present images of landscapes, animals, daily life, special occasions, and Mongolian friends. Diluwa Khutugtu Jamsrangjab, a Lamaist dignitary and a Living Buddha, referred to as Delwa Gegen by Larson, appears in photographs and is frequently mentioned in letters. Photographs of China include the family's home in Kalgan. Also of interest is Mary Louise Larson Walker's photograph album from around 1915 featuring The Chefoo School, Chefoo, China, where she was a student. Chefoo was a boarding school for children of Christian missionaries and other westerners in China. The 2023 Addition contains additional photographs filed under individual family members and includes portraits, images of daily life, and family reunions.

Many of the individuals represented in the papers were also involved in mission work and provide additional perspectives on missionaries in East Asia. Folders often have a handful of letters and perhaps some photographs or a news clipping, but researchers should bear in mind that individuals that have slim folders will also appear in photograph albums and will be discussed in the family correspondence. For example, the folder for Eleanor and Owen Lattimore holds three letters by Eleanor to Mary Larson Walker and one from Owen to Mary's brother James plus an article by Owen Lattimore, but there are items in the photograph files, and frequent descriptions of meetings with Owen Lattimore in Frans August Larson's letters to his daughter. Although not focused on the Larsons, the Kalgan Mission Reports summarize yearly missionary activities, 1896-1900. The file on Ruth Ingram, in addition to a news article about the murder of her husband, a missionary doctor in Kalgan, and some personal correspondence, includes a set of lengthy mimeographed letters sent to friends providing detailed information on her work with nursing schools for UNRRA in China and Burma, 1946-1951. Also of interest is the file on writer Nora Waln, who assisted Larson with the writing of *Larson, Duke of Mongolia*. The file includes an article describing her first meeting with Larson. Finally, many of the letters in the collection are from the years after the family left Asia and concern life in the United States primarily in Alabama, California, and Connecticut, and on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. The letters relate Frans August Larson's and Mary

Rodgers Larson's short-lived venture as chicken farmers in Alabama, Mary's difficult onset of dementia and her passing, Frans August Larson's triumphant trip to Sweden as the famous Duke of Mongolia, and his final years in California and British Columbia. Throughout his correspondence, he returns again and again to thoughts of Mongolia. Due to Cold War political realities, he was never able to return.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent, material type, or subject matter. The 2023 addition is listed last and arranged alphabetically by name of family member, topic or type of material.

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

Hedin, Sven Anders, 1865-1952.
Ingram, Ruth, 1891-1967.
Larson family--Genealogy.
Larson family.
Larson, Frans August, 1870-1957.
Larson, Frans August, 1870-1957. Frans August Larson papers.
Larson, Mary Rodgers, 1869-1947. Mary Rodgers Larson papers.
Lattimore, Eleanor Holgate, 1895-1970.
Lattimore, Owen, 1900-1989.
Rodgers family.
Walker family.
Walker, C. Lester (Charles Lester). C. Lester Walker papers.
Walker, Mary Larson, 1898-1991. Mary Larson Walker papers.
Waln, Nora, 1895-1964.
Zhamsranzhav, B. (Bashluugiin), Dilav Khutagt, 1884-1965.

Organizations

Chefoo School.
Kalgan Mission Station.
Northfield Bible Training School.
Sino-Swedish Expedition (1927-1935)
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Subjects

Americans--China--Zhangjiakou.
Americans--China.
Americans--Mongolia.
Animals--Mongolia.
Bible colleges--Massachusetts--Northfield.
Boarding schools--Shandong Sheng (China)--Yantai.
Bronzes, Ancient--China--Inner Mongolia.
Bronzes, Ancient--Collectors and collecting.
Chickens--Alabama.
Dementia.
Farms--Alabama.
Landscapes--Mongolia.
Missionaries--China--Zhangjiakou.
Missionaries--China.

Missionaries--East Asia.
Missionaries--Mongolia.
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Missions--Vermont.
Nursing schools--Burma.
Nursing schools--China.
Nursing.
Scientific expeditions--China.
Scientific expeditions--Mongolia.
Swedes--China--Zhangjiakou.
Swedes--China.
Swedes--Mongolia.
World War, 1939-1945--China--Journalists.

Places

Alabama--Description and travel.
Alabama--Social life and customs.
California--Description and travel.
California--Social life and customs.
Canada--Description and travel.
Canada--Social life and customs.
China--Commerce.
China--Description and travel.
China--Discovery and exploration.
China--History--1861-1912.
China--History--Republic, 1912-1949.
China--Social life and customs.
Mongolia--Commerce.
Mongolia--Description and travel.
Mongolia--Discovery and exploration.
Mongolia--History--19th century.
Mongolia--History--20th century.
Mongolia--Social life and customs.
Sweden--Description and travel.
United States--Description and travel.
United States--Social life and customs.
Vancouver Island (B.C.)--Description and travel.
Vancouver Island (B.C.)--Social life and customs.
Zhangjiakou (China)--Description and travel.
Zhangjiakou (China)--History.
Zhangjiakou (China)--Social life and customs.

Titles

Larson family papers

Occupations

Diplomatic advisors.
Educators.
Entrepreneurs.
Expedition guides.
Journalists.
Missionaries.

Nurses.

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BOX 1	Campbell, C. W., expedition in Mongolia with F. A. Larson, 1903
BOX 1	Clarke, Eric, and Ruth Clarke, 1926, 1947-1955, undated
BOX 1	Colgate, Beatrice, and S. Bayard Colgate, 1953-1963
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BOX 1	Hedin, Sven Anders, 1926-1932, 1969, undated
BOX 1	Ingram, Ruth, medical work in China, 1934-1959
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BOX 13	"That Dragon Cloud was No Miao," 1945, 1954, 1984
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